

PROPHET MUHAMMAD



A Young Adult's Guide to
the Early History of Islam

ABU MOOSA REZA

In this comprehensive, concise, and easy to read chronicle, Abu Moosa Reza has recounted the most defining era of Islam, its birth, at the hands of its first preacher, the Last Prophet Muhammad. By narrating the story of the budding days of Islam through the lenses of the message and the mission of the Holy Prophet, Mr. Reza has covered all critical events in the life of its founder; the events that stimulated many social, political, and intellectual movements throughout Asia and most of Europe. In contrast to many other books on the early history of Islam, this book provides the reader with a deeper perspective of the pre-Islamic sensitivities, biases, and alliances that affected the direction of Islam immediately after the demise of the Holy Prophet, both as a religion and as a political force. Many modern-day synergies and conflicts could be understood after reading this book by realizing the events past and present as a continuum rather than a one-off happening.

I bring blessings upon you (O' Muhammad), so that the breeze of nearness may increase. Since, with the nearness of the Whole, all parts are allowed to approach.

Rumi

Prophet Muhammad

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Silver Pond Knowledge Center, LLC

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A Young Adult's Guide to the Early History of Islam
by Abu Moosa Reza**

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READ THIS BEFORE READING THIS BOOK

Who should read this book?

Anybody who is interested in a simple and unbiased narrative of the early history of Islam in the context of the life of Prophet Muhammad should read this book.

What is the scope of this book?

This book is the life story of the Prophet of Islam from the point of view of his Message and his Mission. Event and characters that do not help in understanding these two aspects of the Prophet of Islam are out of the scope of this book.

Where does this book take you?

The storytelling style of this book tries to have you travel hundreds of years back in time, to the Arabia of 570 CE, until the 632 CE, during the lifetime of the Prophet of Islam. The narratives in this book are a lot to be felt than to be memorized. You will be the judge of how far this book succeeded in doing this.

When to read this book?

As soon as possible! Islam is and will remain the topic of interest, both as a social catalyst and a transformative political force that would shape our present and future in one way or the other. Whether you are a Muslim or a non-Muslim, you need to know the historical and cultural contexts of Islam informed by a Muslim.

Why should you read this book?

The world we live in is mostly shaped by either the ideologies or the ecosystems. Ideologies are influenced by religions, and ecosystems are influenced by economics. Islam is both an ideology and an ecosystem. Reading this book will help you

appreciate Islam for what it is and discern from what it has been made to look like.

How to read this book?

This book is divided into twelve sections. Each section is arranged around major events in the life of the Prophet of Islam. Each new section carries over from the previous one since the events are logically related. To truly get a 'travel back in time' feel, it's highly advisable to read the book in the sequence of these sections.

Section-I introduces the reader with the essential knowledge of Arabian customs and their way of life. Since it's a bit more involved due to the geography, dates, and names, you may need to read it a couple of times before indulging yourself with the rest of the book, which I promise is going to be a very interesting read.

For brevity, the customary salutations for the Holy Prophet and others are omitted throughout the book. It is advised to mention these salutations as you read the book to get a feel of the etiquette of the Islamic culture.

- Customary salutation such as 'peace be upon him, and his progeny' is reserved for the Prophet of Islam.
- Customary salutation such as 'peace be upon him or her' is reserved for the biblical holy personalities such as Abraham, Jesus, and Mary and the household of the Prophet of Islam such as Ali and Fatima.
- Optional salutations such as 'may God be pleased with him or her' are reserved for the Muslims who accepted Islam in the lifetime of the Prophet.

Let's dive in!

READ THIS BEFORE READING THIS BOOK

Section I: ARABIA BEFORE THE PROPHET

This section provides a context for the rest of the book. Learning about who Arabs were, their origins, their customs, their lifestyle, and the things they held dear would help us understand the circumstances and events during the time of the Prophet.

Section I: ARABIA BEFORE THE PROPHET

THE LANDSCAPE

Land of Arabia is the birthplace of the Prophet of Islam.

It's a peninsula located in the west of Asia best known for its vast deserts and high sand dunes. The major human civilizations always surrounded the region, yet no significant human culture originated from here. The reason being, there were no permanent rivers or the major bodies of water available to sustain one. This geographical reality turned out to be a mixed blessing for those who chose to live here. Life was tough due to its lack of land resources, but also due to its daunting terrain, it never became an attraction for the ambitious conquerors of the past. The region was known as the Arabian Peninsula.

Geographically, the Arabian Peninsula was divided into three distinct territories, which helped define its political landscape as well.

- Arabia Petraea or the Rome's Province of Arabia: This part of the Arabian Peninsula was of the most interest to the ancient empires due to its agricultural productivity and its proximity to the Holy Land of Jerusalem.
- Arabia Deserta: This was the largest and the most barren part of the Arabian Peninsula, consisting of many modern-day Gulf Arab kingdoms. Historically it was ruled by a cluster of nomad tribes at any given time.
- Arabia Felix or Fertile Arabia: This comprised the fertile areas of modern-day Yemen bordering the Red Sea on its west and the Arabian Sea on its south.

Politically deprived of anything significant in itself, the Arabian Peninsula had very powerful neighbors though. On its north was the ancient region of the Levant consisting of modern-day Syria and Lebanon, beyond which rested the mighty Eastern Roman empire called Byzantine. On its east was the ancient region of Mesopotamia, the land of the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates, consisting of modern-day Iraq and Kuwait. Further east was the vast empire of Persia stretching from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia, most of which is modern-day Iran. On its south was the Arabian Sea across which were the ancient lands of India and China. On its west was the Red Sea across which was the continent of Africa consisting of the kingdoms of Nobatia, Makuria, Alodia, Abyssinia, and the Roman governorate of Egypt.

Modern geographers divided the Arabian Peninsula into seven geographical entities, some of which turned out to be the individual nation-states after World War II. These were the provinces of Yemen, Hadramaut, Oman, Iraq, Bahrain, Najd, and the province of Hijaz.

Hijaz the Holy Land

The province of Hijaz is known as the holy land or the land of pilgrimage deriving its significance from the city of Mecca, or Becca as is called in the Qur'an. Mecca is celebrated for the placement of the sacred edifice Ka'ba, the black-clad sanctuary built by the biblical Prophet Abraham and his son Ishmael. Mecca, along with the territory several miles around it, is held sacred and hence is called 'Harem' which literally means respected. Mecca is also the city where the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad, was born.

Medina, another major town of Hijaz, was declared 'Harem' once the Prophet moved here after spending fifty-three years of his life in Mecca. Medina, or Yathrib, as it was previously called, became the capital of the Kingdom of God that the Prophet established in his lifetime. It also became his final resting place after his passing away. The two cities combined are called 'The Two Holy Sanctuaries' or the 'Haramayn Sharifain'.

Here's an illustration of the Arabian Peninsula showing the cities of Mecca, Medina, and Ta'if along the coast of the Red Sea.



PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIAN WAY OF LIFE

The Gods

The Arabs originally believed in one God, but at the time when Prophet Muhammad was born, their religion had deformed into various forms of Polytheism and Star-worshipping. There still were a few small communities of monotheists left, but the majority of the Arabs worshiped a number of semi-gods. Each tribe had its unique pattern god. Idols were found in every house, and offerings were paid to them in order to secure their pleasure and to avoid their wrath. Above them all, however, they had a dim idea of a Supreme Being called 'Allah'. Since Allah was a common deity of all, by His name, they used to swear, and in His name, their major covenants used to be sealed. The lower gods belonged to one tribe or the other and hence were not deemed universal enough to be invoked in such cases. In worshipping matters though, Allah had the last place.

They also worshipped angels whom they called goddesses or the wives and daughters of their gods. Al-Lat, a huge image of grey granite and the chief god of the tribe of Thaqif at Ta'if, and Al-Uzza, a carved piece of rock some twenty feet high, were worshipped as the wives of the Supreme God. Hobal, a huge idol in the form of a man, which was brought from Syria and installed in a high place of honor, was worshipped in Ka'ba along with the numerous other idols. Images of Abraham and Ishmael, each carrying in their hands divine arrows, were affixed in Ka'ba for worship and veneration.

The People

Modern Arabs belong to two major chains¹: Arab al-Ariba and Arab Mostariba.

Arab al-Ariba were the 'original Arabs' who were the children of Kahtan and were settled on the south side of Mecca. Kahtan had a son named 'YaRab'; the term Arab is linked back to him.

Arab Mostariba or 'the Arabs who learned Arabic' were the descendants of Adnan, who was the descendant of Prophet Ishmael, the elder son of Prophet Abraham. Prophet Abraham was originally from Iraq. His wife Hager, the mother of Ishmael, was from Egypt. Hager and Ishmael were transplanted in the city of Mecca by Prophet Abraham. Arab Mostariba settled around the Ka'ba, and Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, came from this chain. Both of these chains are said to go back to Sam, the son of Noah.

The Tribes

Arabs were a tribal culture. Tribal affiliations were held supreme, sometimes even above the various gods they took as sacred mascots. A tribe was headed by a tribal leader, who enjoyed many privileges but also had many more responsibilities. The tribal head was the go-to person for sustaining the livelihood of the whole tribe. His duties included finding the best pastures for the herd animals, forming the trade expeditions, resolving disputes internally and with other tribes, maintaining law and order, dispensing justice, presiding religious events, even deciphering the will of the tribe's gods. People without a tribe or belonging to a weaker tribe were considered the most vulnerable people of Arabia and were at the total mercy of the powerful and connected individuals around them.

The Means of Living

Arabs, whether settled in cities like Mecca or the outskirts, had only a handful of livelihoods at their possession. Trading and

business in day to day merchandise were mostly the profession of the noble or the affluent. Herding the camels, goats, and sheep or limited pasturing was common for those who could afford to keep or manage a herd. Being hired as a domestic worker or the laborer was the third and the most common profession; protecting the large herds, being caretakers for the trade expeditions, or working as helpers for the rich people were common. Limited farming in areas where it was feasible was also a common practice. Raiding the trade caravans was also a means to earn a serious livelihood for those who could take the risk of retribution and the wrath of the whole tribes in retaliation.

The Camels

No discussion of Arabia would be completed without the mention of the camel. For Arabs, the animal served many purposes; it was used as a means of human and goods transportation across the vast swaths of desert capable of carrying hundreds of pounds of weight for miles, occasionally without water. Its skin was used to make the various articles of use for its owner; for making tents, winter coats, water buckets, blankets, and shoes. Its wool was used for making rugs and hats, meat and milk for the feasts, and dried dung for the fuel. With so many uses, it was considered one of the most valuable commodities in Arabian life. Camels were used as gifts, as barter trade, as an inheritance, as the sacrifice to gods; even as compensation for certain crimes, for example, ten camels were considered as an acceptable compensation for a murder, that was, only when the victim's beneficiary would have considered forfeiting the revenge killing of the murderer.

The Period of Ignorance

Obviously, not many people could afford to pay this ransom amount. Fetching the compensation of the ten camels was not an easy feat, and sometimes the whole tribes had to chip in to save their lads from being murdered in customary retaliation. For those who couldn't afford the blood money, it used to turn into a chain of unsettled murders resulting in blood-soaked feuds spanning over tens of generations. For the rich, it was a game, and there used to be offers of handing over poor men's sons for the satiation of their swords for the price of ten camels.

Like any society functioning on values lower than the basic human considerations, women were at the lowest of the social pyramid, not considered even the worth of a camel — wives of a deceased person used to be distributed among his sons from the other mothers. Women used to be traded in markets, priced by the utility they could provide to their new masters who could be both, the rich men or the women of Arabia. Then it was solely their discretion of how and for what purposes they could be utilized. Many used to be killed while they were babies since it used to be insulting to a man for having many daughters. Once grown up, it was expected of them to be treated as a commodity for the sole pleasure of men. It was common for women to cover their heads, the tradition they had carried from the moral codes of Abraham and Ishmael, but was also common to expose their upper torsos and the remaining parts of their bodies to increase their worth in the eyes of the rich and resourceful men. Among the women of 'rich, powerful, and corrupted', it was common to have children from multiple men. This practice was common to the extent that there used to be specialized folks who used to ascertain the fathers of the children born after such unions. Many of the notables from the Meccan clans of Banu Umayya and Banu Makhzum had this kind

Section I: ARABIA BEFORE THE PROPHET

of 'union' birth. Although there still were women left, who used to strictly adhere to the universal codes of the morality of the past prophets, the general state of most of the Arabian women was more than pitiful in that power and wealth centric society.

Wars used to be the most wretched of the times for all those involved. There used to be no regard for human life, honor, dignity, or the care for the livestock. Every act of atrocity was kosher in the state of war. Women obviously used to bear the most brunt of these wars, where they used to be captured and exchanged like cattle. Disregard for any life, human or otherwise, was so deep in the Arabian culture that it was common for a herd owner to cut off the rear of a fat-tailed sheep when and where he needed. Pilgrimages were common, but it was considered sacrilege to cover their privates during the ritual circumambulation of the Ka'ba. Making circuits around Ka'ba in the state of nakedness was considered the most devoted and hence, the most pervasive acts of worship.

Such were the chaotic times in which Prophet Muhammad was sent among his people to preach the articles of monotheism; the oneness of God, the sin-avoiding way of life, adherence to the basic human morality, the regard for women in having equal rights, and the idea of accountability in this world and in the Day of Judgment.

POPULAR ARABIC TRADITIONS

Although hugely fractured on tribal lines, there remained some practices that united the whole of Arabia. These were the traditions that transcended various affiliations that Arabs held dear.

The Hajj

Abraham was the first who called the people to visit the holy house. Mecca was the center of yearly pilgrimage from all of Arabia and surrounding regions from times immortal. Ka'ba was the grand center of the religion, visiting it was the most sacred duty. The Major Pilgrimage or the 'Hajj al-Akbar' was to be performed in the absolute last month of the lunar calendar. The Minor Pilgrimage or the 'Hajj al-Asghar', also known as 'Omra' could be undertaken in any other months but had special merits if performed in the seventh month of the year. The rituals of both types of Hajj called for walking in the footsteps of the prophet Abraham, Ishmael, and Abraham's wife, Hager.

Sacred Months

The lunar calendar months of Muharram (the 1st month), Rajab (the 7th month), Dhu al-Qidha (the 11th month), and Dhu al-Hijjah (the 12th and the final month) in each year were regarded as holy – a system dating from the time of the call of Prophet Abraham for the ritual of Hajj.

These were the months when the traffic to and from Mecca was at its peak. Hajj caravans arrived in the month of Dhu al-Qidha, performed religious rituals in Dhu al-Hijjah, and returned during the month of Muharram. Second only to this was the season of the Minor Hajj during the month of Rajab. During these four months, every sort of violence and warfare was forbidden, a

self-regulated universal amnesty was maintained throughout Arabia, all hostile activities and all tribal feuds used to be suspended, a tradition which was subsequently upheld in Qur'an after the introduction of Islam to Arabia.

The Poetry and Literature of Arabia

Arabs used to take huge pride in their poetic tradition for its eloquence and its artistic value, so much so that Arabic poetry formed the foundation of the vocabulary and grammar of the classical Arabic language. Poetry was mostly thematic; there were more than a dozen poetic themes. Poets or 'shoara - singular shaer' used to compose their work in multiple themes throughout their literary career, eventually specializing in one or two themes based on their temperaments. Major themes included poetry about lionizing their tribe, about condemning their rivals, about the poet's love interest - mostly someone imaginary, about valor and war, about hunting, about wines and spirits, even about their horses and camels.

Poets mastering multiple themes were celebrated as more than simple entertainers in their tribes. Besides being the esteemed teachers of literature, they were the designated historians, genealogists, ambassadors, journalists, opinion-makers, and political campaigners. It was common for Arab warriors to recite their odes signifying one's valor and the superiority of one's lineage before the single combats, which mostly used to culminate in the death of at least one of them. Subsidized by the rich and powerful or hired by themselves, as Arab poets were not poor by any means, poets used to retain orators who were called 'rawi'. They used to accompany poets everywhere they used to be invited. The sole job of the rawi used to be to memorize their poet's work and recite it on demand in gatherings and celebrations suiting to the occasion.

POPULAR ARABIC TRADITIONS

It's said that initially, the original Arabs, the Arab al-Ariba were better at the literature of the Arabic language but overtime the Arab Mostariba, the children of Adnan, who had settled in and around major cities, took over the mastery of the Arabic language and literature. It was due to their broader exposure of various currents of Arabic poetry as the Arabian cities used to be strategically located at the crossroads of various trade routes. Overtime poetic potential of Meccans excelled over others, for being the citizens of the host city of Ka'ba and the yearly destination of hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from all over the peninsula.

RISE OF BANU HASHIM

Qosayy, the grandfather of Hashim and the great-grandfather of the Holy Prophet, was the Sheikh of Mecca and the Chief of the surrounding territory. The five core privileges of the custodian of Ka'ba were vested in him, namely the possession of the keys of the Ka'ba, the right of providing the food and drink to the pilgrims, the commandership of the troops, the flag bearer and the right to assign one during the battles, and the presidency of the consultative council.

After he passed away, his offices were inherited by his four grandsons, Hashim, who was born around 442 CE, Al-Muttalib - not to be confused with Abd al-Muttalib, who was the son of Hashim, Nawfal, and Abd Shams. Hashim was allotted the rights of providing the food and drink to the pilgrims. He was very affluent and was in the position to amicably fulfill the trust of hosting the pilgrims of the Holy Ka'ba. His devoted hospitality had earned him great love and reverence in the eyes of the Arabs. His public service and charity during the three years long famine had increased his popularity even more. In accordance with his executive duty, Hashim also used to organize summer and winter trade expeditions for his people to bring the much-needed resources into the city of Mecca.

Umayya's Envy - Retribution and Exile

Ever-increasing love and fame for Hashim used to invite regular envy, as is common in the dynamics of human relations. Hashim's brother Shams and his son Umayya were wealthy, but instead of utilizing their wealth for the betterment of their kin, they used to employ it in vain competitions with Hashim, and in doing so used to receive unwanted ridicule from the Qureish.

Ordinary Qureishites used to watch their vain competitions with contempt. Umayya once was so enraged at seeing Hashim's reverence among his countrymen, that he openly challenged his uncle Hashim to a trial of superiority in serving the pilgrims and in earning more riches during their trade expeditions. Hashim wished to avoid such a show of grandiosity with someone much younger and so deficient in substance. But the Qureish used to love such inane exhibitions, so they forced Hashim to accept the challenge. Hashim, who wanted Umayya and his musings out of his way, thought to make more of it. He reluctantly consented with the stipulation that the losing party would give fifty well-bred camels as retribution and would accept, for ten years, an exile from Mecca. Inevitably emerging a victor, Hashim took the fifty valuable camels, slaughtered them, and fed all the poor people of his city. Umayya subsequently had to be escorted out of Mecca from where he chose to set out for Syria. He remained there in exile for ten years as a punishment for calling in vain competitions to show off his clan's perceived superiority to fellow Arabs.

This and other such events became the origin of the envy that Umayyads embraced so passionately against the Mission of the Holy Prophet throughout his lifetime. A few decades later, even after accepting the new faith which had become vogue in Arabia by then, Umayyads never truly forgave Banu Hashim for the honor of a Prophet born among them. Events that transpired soon after the demise of Muhammad testified to their continued tribal jealousy against his descendants.

THE GRANDFATHER OF THE PROPHET

Abd al-Muttalib was the grandfather of the Holy Prophet, the caretaker of the Prophet during his orphan years, and the famous Chief of Mecca, who invoked God's wrath on the invading armies assembled to destroy Ka'ba.

From Sheiba al-Hamd to Abd al-Muttalib

At the time of Hashim's death, around 510 CE, his son Sheiba al-Hamd was a mere child and was away at the city of Medina with his mother Salma, daughter of Amr, who herself was a lady of much distinction and influence in Medina. She was an extremely independent individual who used to take care of her father's vast business at his wish and was known for her business acumen and her political connections. At the time of her marriage, she had declared to Hashim that her only wish was to remain with her parents and not to move with him to Mecca, which Hashim had graciously agreed. Naturally, their son Sheiba used to live with Salma in Medina, where she schooled him well in leadership, trade, and tribal networking. Sheiba al-Hamd was called such because he had a streak of white hair at the time of his birth. Sheiba meant 'aged' or 'white-haired'.

Hashim used to lead trade expeditions all across Arabia and was the first to take the Meccan caravans beyond Syria. In one such expedition, he fell extremely ill and died while away from home. He was buried in Gaza, Palestine. At his deathbed, Hashim entrusted the offices held by him to his trusted brother Al-Muttalib and instructed him to give the charge to his son Sheiba once he was capable. Al-Muttalib kept on carrying out the pilgrim hosting duties in Mecca entrusted by his deceased

brother Hashim in the same galore and generosity that Hashim was famous for.

Meanwhile, his young nephew Sheiba al-Hamd was growing up in Medina under the care of his widowed mother. When Sheiba grew a bit older, Al-Muttalib brought him back to Mecca, where the Qureish unaware of the birth of Hashim's son, presumed Sheiba al-Hamd to be the slave of Al-Muttalib. The impression eventually corrected, and he, even though accepted as the son of Hashim, was from now on known as Abd al-Muttalib, the 'slave of Al-Muttalib'.

Umayya's Envy – Attempted Coup D'état

The four sons of Abd Manaf were generally divided into two parties, often at odds with each other. Hashim and Al-Muttalib formed one party, carrying the legacy of their great ancestors in its full glory, while Nawfal and Abd Shams, formed the other; often erecting hurdles to gain faux superiority. Sometime after Hashim's death, Al-Muttalib also fell ill, but before his death, Al-Muttalib managed to hand over the offices of his deceased brother Hashim to his rightful heir Sheiba, now called as Abd al-Muttalib. With their rival brothers out of the way, Abd Shams and Nawfal conspired to usurp the rights of their inexperienced nephew in which they almost succeeded, until Abd al-Muttalib called on his maternal cousins from the city of Medina for help, who responded immediately and reestablished Abd al-Muttalib's rightful position in the city of Mecca.

DISCOVERY OF THE WELL OF ZAMZAM

Having been reinstalled in the office of hosting the pilgrims, Abd al-Muttalib restarted discharging his ancestral duties in serving the pilgrims. But having only one son Harith, he found himself too weak to cope with the holy duties. This was in addition to facing the opposing factions of Qureish on the political front. In one such moment of weakness, he prayed for ten sons as his supporters and solemnly vowed to sacrifice one for God if this wish was granted. His prayers were answered, and he began to have his sons one after another. Later he received a vision of a heavenly caller ordering him to search for the well of ZamZam, which for centuries had been choked up, and its existence was forgotten.

He started a diligent search for the site of the well in the vicinity of the Ka'ba and eventually succeeded in discovering the masonry work. Despite the extreme discouragement from the Qureish, Abd al-Muttalib, aided by his only grownup son Harith, dug deeper and deeper until he came upon two golden Gazelles with the swords and the suits of armor buried there by the Jorhomite king Amr bin Harith, more than three centuries ago. Similar to the father-son duo of Abraham and Ishmael, who had accomplished the building of the Ka'ba, the well of ZamZam was rediscovered by the father-son duo of Abd al-Muttalib and Harith. The plentiful flow of sweet water from the well of ZamZam was a great victory for Abd al-Muttalib and helped cement the prominent status of the Banu Hashim clan he now was leading.

A Replay of Ishmael's Sacrifice

Abd al-Muttalib, now surrounded by the ten sons he had wished for, kept rising in prestige throughout Arabia due to the same hallmark generosity and service that had been the exceptional trait of his benevolent forefathers. Every time he would look at his sons, he recalled the vow he had made to devote one son to God. One day he took all of his sons to Ka'ba, and a random draw was cast for each of the sons to single out the one to be sacrificed. The fatal lot fell upon Abd Allah, the most beloved of the sons. It was very hard for Abd al-Muttalib, but the vow had to be fulfilled. Upon the insistence of his daughters, Abd al-Muttalib held the draw again, this time against Abd Allah and the ten rare camels, equivalent of the blood-money of a man in those days in Arabia. Had God accepted it, the boy was saved. The draw again came out in the name of Abd Allah. Abd al-Muttalib added ten more camels and cast the draw again. At each successive redraw, he added ten camels. Finally, at the tenth draw, the cast came out in the name of the camels. Abd al-Muttalib was still not satisfied, so he cast the draw thrice, every time the cast came out in the name of camels. Satisfied and definitely gratified at the acceptance from God, the joyous father slaughtered all hundred camels between the mounts of as-Safa and al-Marwah and feasted the citizens of Mecca for many days. It was this young Abd Allah, who later became the father of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. The sacrifice of his father Abd Allah and his ancestor Prophet Ishmael was held back and was replaced by a greater sacrifice of his progeny at Karbala.²

The influence of Banu Hashim now was firmly established under the leadership of Abd al-Muttalib, a large family of many sons added to his prowess, he became and continued to his death, the Chief of the Sheikhs of Mecca.

TRIUMPH OF BANU Umayya

The two respected and often coveted offices of the exclusive privileges of supplying water and providing food to the pilgrims of Ka'ba secured a commanding place for the Hashemites among Arabs. But the clan of Abd Shams with their numerous resources and connections spanning from Mecca to Syria continued in their maneuverings against the Hashemites. In the footsteps of his father, Harb, son of Umayya, now leading the Umayyad clan, attempted to dislodge the chief of Hashemites Abd al-Muttalib from the guardianship of Ka'ba. Harb, too failed miserably, the same way his father Umayya had revolted and failed against Hashim. These successive failures added insult to the injury for Umayyads, who now were determined to exact the revenge on Hashemites.

Hashemites in Disarray

So long as Abd al-Muttalib was alive, he remained the anchor of Hashemites and the leader of the chiefs of Mecca. But after his death, there was no strong and unifying figure left among his children. His elder son Harith had already passed away in his lifetime. Zubair was the oldest, Abd al-Muttalib himself wanted Zubair to inherit his offices but shying away from the responsibility, he abdicated in favor of Abu Talib. For him too, it quickly became unbearable to maintain the expensive offices of providing for the food and drink to the pilgrims. He remained the chief of Hashemites but handed down the offices to Abbas, who was much older than Hamza and was more affluent than the others. Abu Lahab, another son, though older than Abbas and Hamza both, was not trusted in his clan of Banu Hashim being in close alliance with the Umayyads and having married the daughter of Harb. Abbas also proved incapable of retaining

TRIUMPH OF BANU Umayya

the two offices. Eventually, the exclusive privilege of feeding the pilgrims was taken away by the rivals. Abbas managed to keep the office of water disposition through the charge of the well of ZamZam, which remained with him until the introduction of Islam and was later confirmed to his descendants by the Prophet himself. This was the same Abbas, the uncle of the Holy Prophet, whose descendants established the vast empire of Banu Abbas centuries later.

Change of Hands

With this, the overall influence of the Banu Hashim gradually receded, although never erased, while their rivals' fortunes were on the steady rise under the leadership of Harb, the ambitious son of Umayya. The newly assumed Umayyad leadership over Qureish continued for another fifty years under the leadership of Abu Sufyan son of Harb, until the grand event of the conquest of Mecca by the Holy Prophet.

Section I: ARABIA BEFORE THE PROPHET

Section II: FIRST FORTY YEARS OF THE PROPHET'S LIFE

The first forty years of the Prophet's life are all about the image building of the Prophet. These years are characterized by the events that helped set the stage for the introduction of Islam. In these years, God had His Prophet prepare the grounds to plant the seed of Islam in Arabia. Prophet Muhammad's support system, his allies, his affiliations, his audiences, even his enemies were being defined in these early years.

Section II: FIRST FORTY YEARS OF THE PROPHET’S LIFE

THE PROPHET'S BIRTH AND YOUNGER YEARS

The prophet of Islam, Muhammad, was born in the same year when Abraha bin al-Sabah, the Ethiopian viceroy of Yemen, a Christian by faith, made an expedition against Mecca boasting his mighty infantry of elephants, in order to destroy the Ka'ba. The year was known as Aam al-Feel or the 'Year of the Elephant', and the invaders were called the As-hab al-Feel, the 'People of the Elephant'. An act of God destroyed the mighty army, and the Ka'ba was saved from certain annihilation.³

Place and Date

About fifty days after the miraculous rescue of Ka'ba, the Holy Prophet was born in Mecca in a house called She'b Abi Talib, on the day of Friday. The date of the birth some historians recognized was the 12th of Rabi al-Awwal, while others recognized it to be on the 17th of Rabi al-Awwal. The date roughly coincides with the 29th of August, 570 CE.

Divine Selection of Name

Amena bint Wahb⁴, the Prophet's mother, had various visions and dreams as she was carrying the blessed child. One such vision was when an angel directed her to name the baby Ahmed or Muhammad many days before the baby was born. Like many other prophets, Prophet Muhammad's was a miraculous birth; at the moment of his coming into the world, a celestial light enveloped the surrounding country, and the newborn child raising his eyes to heaven, proclaimed, "God is great!, There is no god but God, and I am His prophet."⁵ As soon as he was born, a messenger was sent to his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib, who hastened to the infant, carried him in his arms, took him to

Ka'ba, and announced the name Muhammad, which means in Arabic 'the praised'.

Orphaned at Birth

Muhammad's father, Abd Allah, the favorite son of Abd al-Muttalib, did not live to see the birth of his child. Soon after his wedding celebrations, the newly married Abd Allah left for Syria on a business expedition. On his way back, he fell ill and was left behind in the city of Medina with his father's maternal cousins while the caravan kept marching towards Mecca. On hearing of Abd Allah's illness, Abd al-Muttalib sent his eldest son Harith to fetch Abd Allah home, but when Harith arrived in Medina, it had been too late. Harith came empty-handed with the sad news of Abd Allah's demise. Abd Allah was but twenty-five years of age at the time of his death. He was buried in Medina.

Loss of the Mother

When the Holy Prophet was roughly five years of age, his mother, Amena, took up the journey to Medina around the 575 CE, to visit Abd Allah's grave. After seeing her beloved husband's grave, she remained very depressed. After a monthlong stay in Medina, she hastened back to Mecca due to an illness but succumbed to death midway to Mecca, in the small town of Abwa, and was buried there. Umm Ayman, a trusted helper who was accompanying Amena, brought the grieved child back to Mecca and handed him over to his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib.

Death of Abd al-Muttalib

The guardianship of the grandfather lasted for little less than three years, when he breathed his last in 578 CE, leaving the young Muhammad devastated in the eighth year of his childhood. Within the short span of three years, Muhammad

had to endure two subsequent losses of his most dear ones at such a tender age.

Abu Talib's Guardianship

Abd al-Muttalib, on his deathbed, embraced the young grandson Muhammad for the last time and then entrusted him in the care of his most trusted son Abu Talib. Abu Talib and Muhammad's father Abd Allah had a special bond;⁶ they both were the offspring of the same mother while other uncles of his were from other mothers. This and many other factors explain the devotional love that Abu Talib carried for his orphaned nephew Muhammad, the sort of devotion only a most devout follower carries for his master. His wife Fatima Bint Asad was no less zealous in this devotion to the young Hashemite, whom she treated more reverently than her parents and more affectionately than her children.

THE PROPHET'S YOUTH AND HIS ACTIVISM

Many important events transpired in the teen and post-teen years of the Holy Prophet. Successive occurrences of these events and the role Muhammad had in shaping the outcomes, all pointed towards as if God was establishing the persona of Muhammad as the best citizen of Mecca.

Muhammad's trip to Syria and a grim warning

When the Holy Prophet was around twelve years of age, Abu Talib undertook a business journey, coinciding with 582 CE, to Syria and intended to leave Muhammad behind at Mecca, but the latter would insist on accompanying his uncle. Abu Talib gave in to the young nephew's demand and decided to bring him along. Many events that transpired during the journey only helped to increase Abu Talib's devotion towards his young nephew. During one of the last stages of their journey, near the town of Busra, modern-day Busra al-Sham in southern Syria, Abu Talib happened to camp near a church of the Nestorian monks. A monk named Boheira or Sergius noticed that a piece of cloud was continuously shadowing Muhammad wherever he went. He came near Muhammad when he was sitting under a tree which had bowed so low as if it was paying respects to the young Muhammad, to inspect his features closely. He happened to notice an impression, a birthmark, between the shoulder blades of the young Arab, and by some other features on his face, as were foretold in divine scriptures; got convinced that Muhammad was the awaited Messenger of God. After much contemplation, he discussed these signs to Abu Talib, who himself had witnessed many such happenings since his birth. The monk warned Abu Talib of various seen and unseen

dangers, which he said would be waiting aplenty at the hands of his own people.

The Un-Holy War

In the year 585 CE, a tribal feud broke out between Banu Kinana and the Banu Hawazin, in which Muhammad, now a teenager, was forced to help out his uncle Zubair albeit only in a noncombatant role. This war lasted for a total of nine years with regular battles, some of which were fought in sacred months and in the sacred land; hence, the feud was called the Fijar or the 'sacrilegious war'. This war had left deep scars on the collective conscience of Arabs and caused many future political feuds to be averted or shortened by recalling the devastation this war had brought to the social fabric of Arabian society.

Founding the League of the Righteous

Arabian society, bruised by almost a decade-long 'unholy' war in the holy land and the unchecked influence of Umayyads in Mecca, was reeling under the worst form of tyranny it had faced in centuries. Muhammad, now in his twenties, could not bear to see the rampant lawlessness, oppression, and the victimization of the weak in Mecca and its surroundings. He, along with his uncle Zubair, the oldest of the surviving sons of Abd al-Muttalib, initiated an alliance of major tribes of Mecca to abide by basic rules of delivering justice to the victims of violence and oppression. Banu Hashim, Banu Zohra, and Banu Tym took part in the pact and swore that they would stand up for the weak and would ensure that the justice was delivered to the wronged irrespective of their status in the society. Other powerful clans who were the beneficiary of this tyranny, notably the Banu Umayya and Banu Nawfal, were unsurprisingly absent from this pact. The pact was known as 'Hilf al-Fuzool' and was agreed in the year 595 CE. Muhammad, the Holy Prophet, in his later

years, used to describe this pact as one of his fondest memories from his younger years in Mecca.

Being known as a man with the highest integrity

Muhammad was turning out to be the most immaculate citizen of Mecca, in his conduct, in his intelligence, in his wisdom, in his straightforward truthfulness, and in his undisputed wit in resolving the complex tribal and business conflicts. He won the respect of his fellow citizens who used to trust him with their wealth for safekeeping, for executing their monetary deeds on their behalf, and for his impartiality and justice in resolving their conflicts. Without any formal publicity or designation, Muhammad, son of Abd Allah was soon come to be known as Al-Ameen 'The Most Trustworthy' and As-Sadiq, 'The Most Truthful' throughout Mecca and its surroundings.

MARRIAGE WITH KHADIJA

Marriage with Khadija was a major turning point for the young Hashemite, who had faced nothing but hardships from his earliest most childhood. Khadija, as the later events would show, became one of the staunchest supporters of the Holy Prophet in his Mission. Her influence upon Meccans became the greatest ally of Islam, her wealth the greatest resource for the poverty-stricken converts, and herself, as the only wife of the Prophet through whom the progeny of the Holy Prophet continued.

Khadija the Great

The reputation of Muhammad reached Khadija through various sources. She was a noble lady of Mecca from the larger tribe of Qureish and was connected with the Prophet through the blood and marriages. Her father Khuwaylid was a cousin of Prophet's grandfather. Her mother, Fatima, was a cousin of Prophet's mother. Khadija was their third child. Khadija had inherited the business acumen of her father and like him, was among one of the wealthiest merchants of Mecca.

The Business Liaison

Khadija, through a relative of her, asked Muhammad to lead one of her business expeditions to Syria. She offered to double the rate of usual salary to Muhammad, which he accepted after the council from Abu Talib. Meisara, a servant of Khadija acting as the eyes and ears of Khadija, accompanied the Holy Prophet through the journey, watching his every move, and relating every minute detail to Khadija on their return. In Syria, Muhammad conducted the business in such a way that he managed to double the usual profit on Khadija's goods, all the

while gaining immense respect from Syrian merchants for his fairness in business dealings.

After purchasing the reciprocal goods that were to be brought back to Mecca, Muhammad headed back with the caravan. Meisara, by now completely overawed by the character strength of Muhammad, requested him to go ahead of the caravan and deliver to Khadija the good news of the record profits himself. Khadija, surrounded by her friends and maids, was sitting at the upper level of her house, expecting the return of her caravan any day, when she noticed a camel advancing fast towards her villa. As it approached near, she perceived that it was Muhammad, who was riding the camel, and a piece of cloud was shadowing over him while a halo of light was surrounding his impressive persona. She was bedazzled by the purity of his face, the elegance of his gait, and the polity of his manners. Meisara's recounts of the journey only confirmed and enhanced her appreciation for Muhammad.

The Proposal

Soon after the successful Syrian enterprise, she sent Muhammad again towards Yemen, where again, he brought the same success as the previous expedition. By now a widow of many years, and having rejected many proposals from other nobles of Qureish, Khadija's grandeur, virtue, and piety had found her match in Muhammad. She sent a maidservant to Muhammad to discern his inclination regarding marriage. Upon hearing a positive response, she wasted no time in intimating to Abu Talib, Muhammad's uncle and guardian, her desire to marry Muhammad.

The Holiest of the Holy Matrimony

After obtaining Muhammad's consent, Abu Talib informed Khadija and her elders, and the marriage took place in 595 CE. Abu Talib paid down the dower of twelve ounces of gold and twenty camels. He also delivered the marriage sermon, commencing his speech with the praise of Allah and concluding by asking Allah's mercy and blessing on the new couple.⁷

Khadija bore Muhammad two sons; Qasem was the firstborn after whom the Prophet received his surname Abul Qasem, the 'father of Qasim'. Abd Allah, who the Prophet more likely named after his father, was his third born. Both expired in their infancy. In between Qasem and Abd Allah was their illustrious daughter Fatima, who Khadija named more likely after her mother. Fatima's was a miraculous birth, pure same as Mary mother of Jesus. The progeny of Muhammad the Holy Prophet was to spread through Fatima as she was the mother of Hassan and Husain, and through them came forth the holy descendants of the Prophet of Islam.⁸

The Social impact of marriage with Khadija

Marriage with Khadija had a profound psychological impact on the rich and powerful men of Mecca. After all, many of these elites were the ones who wanted Khadija's hand in marriage for themselves, knowing full well her financial status, her great intellect, her high morals, and the prestige of her Qureishite bloodline. And here, Khadija was the one seeking Muhammad, according to some accounts even willing to pay her wedding gift or the Mehr if Muhammad wished so. This marriage highlighted and reinforced the excellence of Muhammad over the elites of Mecca in every aspect. Marriage with Khadija was part of God's grand plan of establishing a high image of Muhammad over the rest of the Meccans.

Meditation in solitude

Khadija's companionship was an extreme source of comfort for the Holy Prophet. She never bothered her exceptional husband with demands that would take him away from his destiny. She learned that Muhammad, for days, used to retire in certain cavern named 'Hira', which was situated on the top of a mountain Jabal al-Nour meaning the 'Mountain of Light'. There he would discretely meditate and focus on the creation and the Creator. This particular cavern was unique in its location. About three miles from Mecca, high up in the mountain, the edifice of the Ka'ba was in the direct sight from the top of the cavern. It was a perfect station for viewing the Ka'ba without being exposed to all the idols that were hosted in its vicinity and within. Such was her devotion to the Mission of her husband that during the retreat days, she would herself deliver the food and supplies to him, walking the miles-long windy mountainous trail, nine hundred feet high, in order not to worry him with the interruptions of a maid or a servant.

MUHAMMAD ADOPTS ALI

Muhammad and Khadija were deeply saddened by the death of their firstborn Qasem, who died before his second birthday. The Prophet's aunt Fatima bint Asad, the wife of Abu Talib, became pregnant around the same time. Fatima bint Asad offered Muhammad and Khadija her newborn for adoption, whether male or female, in order to comfort the beloved couple in their bereavement. Fatima, the only surviving child of Muhammad, was not yet born. The offer proved to be something willed by God. Fatima bint Asad used to describe how, during this pregnancy, she felt compelled to stand in honor whenever her nephew Muhammad would visit them.

Birth of Ali

Muhammad was about thirty years old when Ali was born. Everything related to Muhammad seemed to have been blessed exceptionally. One day Fatima bint Asad was making ritual circuits around Ka'ba when she felt the excruciating labor pains. Holding the wall of Ka'ba, she supplicated to God to ease her unbearable pain. The side of the wall of Ka'ba cracked open, and Fatima bint Asad entered the Ka'ba. Inside Ka'ba, she gave birth to her fourth son, where for three consecutive days, she was kept by God's will.⁹ The year was 600 CE. Traditions say Meccans tried prying the door of Ka'ba open, but little did they know that it was sealed shut by an act of God. The newborn didn't open his eyes until he was given in the arms of Muhammad on the third day when he was visiting Ka'ba, coming back from an out of the town trip. Muhammad named him Ali, 'the exalted one' as the newborn opened his eyes in Muhammad's arms, and the first sight he had was of the radiant face of Muhammad. Muhammad gave the first bath to the baby

Ali, with the prediction that it would be Ali who would give Muhammad his funeral wash. From the birth of Ali until the last breath of Muhammad, the two cousins remained together.

The Prophet trains Ali

When Ali was five years old, Muhammad had Ali moved with him and Khadija. Not living far, Ali was already attached to Muhammad, as Muhammad had known no mother or father other than his uncle Abu Talib and his wife Fatima bint Asad, and used to visit them often. Some say there was a famine in Arabia during those days, and Muhammad may have brought Ali to lessen the burden of Abu Talib. This must not be true though, since Abu Talib was known to feed the destitute and poor of Mecca in the worst of the famine days.

Muhammad's care for Ali was such that the strangers used to take Ali as Muhammad's son. Muhammad would feed little Ali with his own hands and teach him his morals under his tutelage. Years later, Ali himself described this mentorship in his own words as such, "the Holy Prophet brought me up in his own arms and fed me with his own morsel. I followed him wherever he went like a baby-camel following its mother. Each day a new aspect of his character would beam out of his noble person, and I would accept it and follow it as a command."¹⁰

Ali was indeed the first male to believe in the Prophet of God, to pray behind him, and to witness and believe in his divine message as it was revealed. God had favored him with the special blessings that he was brought up in the care of the Prophet of Islam before Islam was even known to Arabs.¹¹

RECONSTRUCTION OF KA'BA

The same year, 600 CE, that Ali was born, another situation developed that tremendously increased the stature of the Holy Prophet among his fellow citizens.

Ka'ba originally was more of an uncovered walled landmark than a roofed chamber. The walls of the Ka'ba were low, and due to the absence of a permanent roof, the relics were exposed to the theft and misplacement. There indeed were instances when a few relics were stolen to be sold in the markets of Syria but were recovered before they could be smuggled out. Then there was the problem of water damage. Mecca was known for its flash floods due to its rocky terrain and the city being in the natural path of the raging water flowing downhill. Flashfloods in winter months used to wreak havoc on various buildings in Mecca, including the structure of Ka'ba.

Due to one such flood which had damaged the walls of Ka'ba beyond repair, the elders of Mecca decided to rebuild the structure. It was determined to raise the walls and put a permanent roof on the cube. All clans of Qureish divided themselves into four groups so every group could take part in constructing at least one wall. The reconstruction itself was not as enormous as the religious value of taking part in this endeavor. The Holy Prophet, along with the rest of the clan of Banu Hashim, was also taking part in building one side of Ka'ba.

The old walls were demolished until the 'Foundation of Abraham'; the layer of green stones in the base of Ka'ba was exposed. Chunks of grey rock were harvested from the neighboring hills carried by the citizens of Mecca on their heads. Blocks were carved to build new and stronger walls of Ka'ba

that could withstand the water damage and to provide better protection against thefts.

Reposting of Hajr al-Aswad, the Black Stone

When the eastern wall reached up to the level where the heavenly black stone, the 'Hajr al-Aswad', was supposed to be affixed, a dispute arose as to which tribe had a higher claim to do the honors. Each tribe asserted superiority and highlighted its 'resume' of services to win the special status — the atmosphere of unity that the construction of Ka'ba had fostered soon evaporated in the zeal of attaining the bragging right of affixing the black stone. The conflict escalated so fast that the bloodshed became imminent. The construction was suspended until the resolution of the issue. At last, an older citizen suggested that the next morning, whoever enters the holy enclosure of Ka'ba through the gate of Bani Sheiba first would win the right to affix the stone. Sheiba was the real name of Muhammad's grandfather Abd al-Muttalib, and the gate was likely named in his honor.

The next morning, the first man who entered the enclosure through the gate of Sheiba was Muhammad, who was not even present on the occasion of the suggestion. Everybody was content seeing their favorite As-Sadiq and Al-Ameen approaching, knowing full well that the best among them had been chosen.

Muhammad, although in his full right to affix the stone himself, spread his cloak on the floor, placed the black stone in the middle, and asked all of the tribal elders to carry the cloak from all sides to raise the cloak to the height of the receptacle. He then installed the black stone with his blessed hands. Every tribe was content; each had shared the honor equally, the

RECONSTRUCTION OF KA'BA

construction resumed, and the memory of Muhammad's wisdom etched deeper in the psyche of every citizen of Mecca.

Section II: FIRST FORTY YEARS OF THE PROPHET’S LIFE

Section III: THE REVOLUTION BEGINS

Soon Muhammad received the first revelation from God. It was a signal to commence his prophetic duties in secret. This era lasted for the next three years. There were a handful of conversions during this period of secrecy, in which mostly immediate members of his family and some close friends accepted his message.

THE MESSAGE AND THE MISSION

Before delving further into Muhammad's life, let's take a pause and read through what his Message was and what his Mission is. A deeper understanding of these two would help us connect with the Holy Prophet's rationale behind his actions, many of which were unconventional and against prevalent norms at the time.

Message: A combination of beliefs and practices

The Message of Muhammad was simple, one part belief, and one part practices.

Beliefs part of the Prophet's Message

The belief or 'eiman' at its core was the conviction in the oneness of God. This meant that every thought and every action of a person, individual or communal, was in God, about God, led to God, and in the realm of God. But there was a salient catch about it too. Once, through Muhammad's efforts, a person had believed in the oneness of God, now God wanted that person to believe in the Messenger of God. For Muhammad, it was a favor returned by God. For a believer, it was a recognition that he had found God through Muhammad. From now on, every word or action Muhammad would utter or perform, would be considered directly coming from God.

Moreover, the belief in the oneness of God necessitated that humanity was considered equal in front of God. Ethnicities, linguistic groups, land barriers, skin color, and all other variances among people were just for the 'recognition' of each other. No individual, group, or nation was superior or exceptional to the others in any shape or form. The human race was one nation and not a race divided.

Practices part of the Prophet's Message

There was a practical aspect of his Message too.

The practices were centered on a simple theme. Anytime a human or society would interact with an element of nature, there would be some best method of going about it. The performance of the collection of these best methods was called the complete 'Submission to God' or Islam.

At the individual level, the Message rested on personal practices. From hygiene to food to bed to rest, from working to earning to saving to spending, from finding someone to liking someone to marrying someone to having children, everything had a prescribed way about it. At the communal level, the Message rested on collective practices. From the leadership to the government, from finances to the taxes, from internal law and order to the external defense, from delivering justice to policing, everything had certain recommendations.

Like any organized religion, there were a few ritualistic actions too, such as five times a day facing Ka'ba and bowing down, abstaining from certain things in a certain month, undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca in a certain time of the year and a handful others. All combined, the obligatory practices were not more than ten in total. Even of those obligatory ones, many were conditional, and until all the conditions were met, the followers were exempted from acting on those. Besides the obligatory ones, there were a few optional ones too. A good Muslim was the one who strived to adhere to as many as he could.

Enforcing them was the responsibility of the authority vested in the leaders selected by God. These leaders, in turn, could allow certain laws to be legislated. Religious beliefs or laws could

never be voted on; everything else was open for consultation or 'shura', which was keenly promoted by the Prophet during his years in Medina when he was the leader of the government. God made it obligatory on the society to follow the competent authority appointed by God Himself.

In its complete form, his Message was Qur'an, which was completed in the lifetime of Muhammad; not an iota in it could be added, or an iota of it could be removed after him. Explaining his Message was his sayings and his actions, which were transmitted to later generations by the institutions he formed in Medina.

Mission: the Delivery and the Execution

Unlike his Message, the Mission of Muhammad was not simple at all; it was one part delivery and one part execution.

Delivery of the Prophet's Mission

The delivery part of his Mission was to teach absolute justice on earth. Absolute justice meant the consistent and complete synchronization of all 'creatures of free will' with the 'Will of God'. Muhammad, as the Messenger, was to teach how to perfect this absolute synchronization between God and his creatures, at all levels of human experience. Everything else that God had created on this earth was already in complete synchronization with God's will; it was only the creatures of free will, that would time to time, go out of sync with the will of God. Muhammad had to teach them consistency in this synchronization.

Execution of the Prophet's Mission

Execution part of Muhammad's Mission rested on the delegation of God's authority on earth. God's authority could only be delegated to a leader who was perfectly synchronized

with the Will of God. This perfect human was to be called the vicegerent of God on earth. Muhammad, in his lifetime, was the vicegerent or the 'Khalifa' of God on earth. Before him, other prophets were God's vicegerents on earth. After Muhammad, there had to be vicegerents of God too. The dispute about their leadership or the 'Wilaya' became the cause of the first and the only ideological division in Muhammad's community. Every other difference stemmed from this. Let's review these terms to make sense out of them.

- **Khalifa and Khilafa:** This delegation of the authority of God was called the 'Khilafa', and the person assuming this authority was called the Caliph or the 'Khalifa'. In practical terms, the Khalifa was God's selected successor of the Holy Prophet.
- **Wali and Wilaya:** The guardianship or the leadership of God's Khalifa was called the 'Wilaya', and the person assuming this leadership was called the 'Wali'. In practical terms, the Wali was God's designated leader of the Muslims.
- **People accepting the leadership of the Wali or the Khalifa** were called to be in the guardianship of the leader or 'in the Wilaya of the Wali of God', alternatively to be 'in the Khilafa of the Khalifa of God'.

All of these terminologies were used numerous times in the Qur'an; Wilaya and Wali being used more often than the Khilafa and Khalifa.

But one thing was sure; the creed of Muhammad's religion could not be completed without believing in all three, the God, the Messenger, and the Wilaya of God's Khalifa. As was evident later, at the end of his life, his teachings, his institutions, and his

traditions made the delivery part of his Mission complete, of course, at great pains of his. The execution part of his Mission was an ongoing process that was to go on until the last day of humanity on this planet earth, hence the necessity of the Wilaya, that is, the leadership of a Khalifa - the successor of the Prophet on earth at all times.

Enforcement of the Message and the Mission

The Holy Prophet was not allowed to force anyone to accept his Message or to subscribe to his Mission. He was categorically told, "So remind, you are only a reminder. You are not a dictator over them,"¹² and for his followers, he was told, "There is no compulsion in religion. Indeed, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in tyranny and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy chain that will never break."¹³ The divine commandments of God denied him and his followers to condemn anybody for their choice of faith or actions. God reminded the Holy Prophet, "You only have to convey, and on Us is the accounting."¹⁴ For those who differed with him, he was told to tell them, "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion."¹⁵

Pushing the Message of Muhammad upon anyone or enlisting anyone forcefully into his Mission was considered the worst form of offense against the commandments of God. Many later misused the Prophet's Message and his Mission to achieve their ambitions of establishing kingdoms and founding empires throughout the Islamic lands.

Now let's go back to Mecca!

THE FIRSTS

Muhammad was forty years old and was already one of the most admired individuals Mecca had carried in recent memory. Prolonged civil war, the Fijar, and the continuous famines robbed people of their basic sense of morality, as survival at any cost was the rule of the game. The result of which was, the inhabitants of Arabia had lost regard for each other's life, property, honor, or liberty. In such a shattered social atmosphere, came an individual who selflessly preferred others over himself, gave out his possessions so others could live honorably, freed slaves from his purse, and invited animosity from his own tribesmen for the sake of those who had no voice in the social hierarchy. God had established him well to plant the first seed of Islam.

The First Revelation

It was the chilly desert night of the 27th of Rajab, the year was 610 CE, and Muhammad was at the cavern of Hira, at his usual retreat where he could get an unadulterated view of Ka'ba without the contamination of idols surrounding it.¹⁶ He was as usual enamored in his contemplation in the oneness of God and the ramifications of it on humanity. As he was sitting there, his surroundings gradually filled with celestial light, soothing in its essence and holy in its substance. As he stood up and composed himself, a dignified human figure appeared in front of him, offered salutations to him in the most respected manners, and introduced himself as the angelic messenger of God, named 'Gabriel' or Jibreel. Muhammad, as if expecting such a meeting, asked the reason for his appearance on which he relayed in the most assuring of voice the first communication of God to the Holy Prophet, the communication which became the first

revealed verses of the Holy Qur'an. The verses were, "Recite, in the name of your Lord, who created. Created man from the clot of the blood. Recite, for your Lord is Generous, who gave knowledge by the pen. He taught the human what he knew not." The year of the first revelation is called the Year of the Be'that or the Mission.

The First Muslims

The very next morning, the Holy Prophet descended from the Jabal al-Nour hurriedly walking towards his home. On his way home, every rock and tree he passed by, he heard voices paying their regards to him; every landmark of Mecca recognized his being, sending their 'Peace and Blessings' on the Prophet of Allah. It must have been the gravity of the Mission, the excitement of the event, and the salutations of every being around him, that when the Prophet reached home, his body was shivering, and he was drenched in sweat. He asked Khadija to cover him with a blanket. A little while later, he recounted to her everything that had happened the previous night.

Khadija herself, a saintly woman, already monotheist in her thoughts, recalled the prediction of her relative Waraqa bin Nawfal, who had informed her that she would marry a Prophet. She immediately affirmed her faith in One God and her husband to be the truthful Prophet of God.

Ali, ten years old by then and already living in the house of Muhammad and Khadija, recounts the event in his own words. "I heard Satan's scream when the first revelation was descended. I asked the Prophet: "What was that?" He answered: "it was Satan, who got disappointed by not being obeyed." He then told me: "You hear what I hear and see what I

see, except you are not a prophet. You are my assistant, and you will never leave the right path.”¹⁷

The First Challenge to the Arabian society

Against Muhammad’s revolution, what the polytheists of the Qureish were offering was minuscule in its scope and its substance. A few manmade idols, each belonging to a different tribe and bunch of rituals surrounding these pitiful figurines of rock and wood, a few tribal codes mostly to sustain the culture of human degradation and doom recycled in repeated edicts of the tribal elders; this was all that Qureish had to offer against the monumental intellectual and practical revolution that was about to knock at their doors. The revolution was Muhammad’s Message and his Mission.

There was one thing that Qureish had going for them though. They were a society that prided itself in its eloquence to the extent that they used to address non-Arabs with the derogatory title of ‘Ajem’, meaning ‘the mute’ or the one who is not understandable in speech. The invitation to ‘recite’ in the first revelation was a stab at the very core of the Arabian literary psyche. These verses were the precursor of the formal challenge of Qur’an, directed at the educated people of Arabia, in which they were dared to produce even one verse like Muhammad’s Message, the Qur’an.

THE SECRET CONVERSIONS

During the next three years, a handful of family members and a few friends of the Holy Prophet converted to this new faith. Some members of the Banu Hashim were already monotheist, accepting Muhammad as the Prophet of God was a natural progression for them. The Holy Prophet was already a prophet in his actions, way before he verbally started preaching the pure faith to his people. After all, it was the people of Mecca, who named the Holy Prophet Al-Ameen and As-Sadiq, the trustworthy and the truthful one by way of watching his conduct for the past forty years of his life among them.

Abu Talib's family affirms its Faith

Abu Talib, the famed uncle of the Prophet, used to watch Muhammad performing his worship in seclusion with his son Ali. Ali used to stand on the right side of the Prophet during these worship sessions. Abu Talib used to see in amazement this novel method of worship, in which they would stand tall, then bow down, then go in prostration touching their foreheads on the dirt, sit in solemn silence and then stand again to repeat the same sequence. He used to see such devotion and humility in their actions for God. Any other kind of worshipping that other Arabs used to perform seemed so superficial to him. One day while he was observing their devotional way of worshipping, his elder son Jaffer came along. As they started, Abu Talib ordered Jaffer to join Muhammad on the left.¹⁸

Abu Talib himself was no stranger to all this. He was a monotheist since his birth, and him being the surrogate father of Muhammad, had seen many signs of exceptional traits in him. He instructed Ali and Jaffer to watch out for Muhammad,

Section II: THE REVOLUTION BEGINS

as the warning of the Nestorian monk regarding the Prophet was ringing loud in his ears. Fatima bint Asad too joined the faith. She was the second woman who became a believer after Khadija.

Zaid bin Haritha accepts Islam

About a decade ago, a destitute youth, ten to twelve years of age at the time, was brought to Mecca. He was kidnapped while separated from his family and now was sold in slavery in the city. Khadija, out of her compassion, paid the asking price for the young boy as she had noticed the distressed kid standing there with the teary eyes in the slave market. She brought him to her home, clothed him in the finest clothes, and told Muhammad about him when he returned from an out of town trip. The plan was to keep him safe in their house until they could locate his parents. The kid was Zaid, son of Haritha, who belonged to a respectable family of the tribe of Kalb. Sometime later, his father came to Mecca to look for his son. He approached Muhammad and offered to repay double the sum that was paid for him, which was politely denied. Muhammad instead asked him to meet Zaid and ask his wish. Zaid, although emotional on seeing his father, refused to leave the loving care of Muhammad and Khadija and remained with the Prophet until the end of his life. The affection he received there was so great that people started calling him the son of Muhammad.

Now twenty years old, Zaid and his wife Umm Ayman readily accepted Islam.

Abu Bakr accepts Islam

Abu Bakr bin Abu Qohafa, a friend of the Prophet, became Muslim soon after. In winters, Meccans used to send trade expeditions mostly to Yemen as the roads to Syria used to be

wrought with snow and bad weather. Abu Bakr was out on one such trip to Yemen. During his journey, he met an old and learned sage of the Yemeni tribe of Azd, who informed him of a Prophet who would soon appear in Mecca, and the sign of him would be that a very young boy and a person of old age would be his first helpers. This prediction remained with Abu Bakr during his trip. When Abu Bakr came back to Mecca, he paid a visit to his friend Muhammad. When he approached Muhammad, he was sitting there surrounded by young Ali and his old father, Abu Talib. Muhammad invited him to Islam, declaring himself the Prophet of God.

Abu Bakr asked him for proof, and Muhammad promptly related him to the prophecy of the older man of Yemen who Abu Bakr had met recently which only he knew about at the time. This, in itself, was proof besides him watching Muhammad being aided by Ali and Abu Talib. Sometime after this discussion, Abu Bakr accepted Islam and became a follower of the Holy Prophet. Abu Bakr was thirty-eight years old at the time of his conversion.¹⁹

Undercover Muslims

There were a few other individuals who, although converted to Islam early on, never announced their faith in front of the Meccans in order to protect the Holy Prophet. Foremost among them was Abu Talib, the guardian of Holy Prophet from his childhood until the time he passed away in Mecca. Abu Talib, even though professed his faith in one God multiple times, one occasion among them during the marriage sermon of Muhammad and Khadija, never openly announced his Islam to his counterparts in Mecca. He skillfully rode the tribal politics, utilizing the stature of his offices of the leader of Banu Hashim to safeguard the Holy Prophet from the mortal danger.

Section III: THE REVOLUTION BEGINS

Announcing his faith would have him impeached from his office, thus ridding himself as the strongest and the most influential supporter of the Holy Prophet in Mecca.²⁰

Waraqa bin Nawfal, the relative of Khadija, was another who never announced his faith openly. His faith was evident by his statement when he predicted Khadija that she would become the wife of a Prophet, and again on the occasion when he helped secure Khadija's marriage with Muhammad. His only ask from Khadija was to have the Holy Prophet intercede on his behalf on the Day of Judgment.²¹

Section IV: INVITATION TO THE CLOSE RELATIVES

So far, Prophet's immediate household and some close friends had accepted the Islamic faith, some openly and some discretely. Islam still was a hidden affair in Mecca. Soon God asked Muhammad to invite his cousins and uncles to his Message and also ordered him to include them in his Mission attached with an offer.

INDEX BY SUBSECTION TO THE CLOSE RELATIVES

THE DEAL OF THE ETERNITY

In the fourth year of the Mission, the revelation came to invite his near relatives. The commandment was a bit stern as the exact wordings were, “Warn your closest relatives,”²² a warning in itself as to how difficult it would be to convince some of them of the new message. The series of family meetings were famously called the Invitation to the Family or the ‘Da’wat Dhu ‘l-Ashira’.

The broken party

The prophet instructed Ali to prepare a simple meal of some wheat and meat with a large bowl of milk. Forty members from the descendants of his grandfather Abd al-Muttalib were invited. All of Prophet’s uncles, including Abbas, Hamza, and Abu Lahab, came to Abu Talib’s house. Muhammad placed the frugal meal in front of them, tasted himself from it first beginning with the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. They all followed and ate their fill; all forty of them, but to their surprise, neither the meal nor the bowl of milk reduced in quantity a bit. Muhammad rose to say something, but Abu Lahab got up, exclaiming Muhammad had enchanted them all, and the party broke up.

The offer and the first introduction

The Prophet invited his cousins and uncles yet another time. He was proving to be more persistent than they had anticipated. Ali prepared the same meal as before. But this time, while the meal was about to be served, Abu Talib rose up, ordering them all to stop eating and listen to what Muhammad had to say. Muhammad stood up and addressed them thus, “O sons of Abd al-Muttalib! I know no man in Arabia who has brought for his

family a more excellent thing than that which I have brought for you. It will serve you well in this life and the life to come. Will you believe me if I tell you that an enemy is going to attack you by day or by night?" They all replied with one voice that they had known him the most truthful of all, and they would surely believe him. Upon which the Prophet said, "Then know you all that Allah has sent me to guide humanity to the right path and has commanded me to call my near relatives, to invite them to His will, and to warn them of His wrath. You have seen the miraculous feast you are entertained with, so persist not in your infidelity. O' children of Abd al-Muttalib! Allah has never sent a Messenger but that He appointed one, his brother, heir, and successor for him, from his own blood relatives. Whoever, therefore, will be committing to assist me in my noble cause will become my brother, my heir and my successor from now on? He will be to me, just as Aaron was to Moses."²³

As Muhammad finished his speech, he looked at the faces of his audience. Except for Abu Talib and Ali, all he saw was the faces full of contempt and ridicule, at best of the utter disbelief. Few were still making sense of what they had just heard, but for the most part, the disdain was apparent on their faces. Not that they didn't know who Muhammad was, some even were familiar with various signs and foretelling of the coming of the Last Prophet among them, but none had an idea that it would be the orphan of Abd Allah who would bring forth such a claim. Was it the shortsightedness or mere disbelief in being a part of such a history turning event, they just sat there mute and stunned?

Muhammad declaring Ali his Successor

As nobody rose up to accept Muhammad as his spiritual guide, the teenager Ali stepped forward and after testifying

Muhammad's status of Al-Ameen and As-Sadiq in front of his cousins and uncles, offered Muhammad his unwavering support. Muhammad, with a hand gesture, asked Ali to sit down and allow one of his elders to come forward instead. Except for a few distasteful murmurs, there still was no response. Ali stood up again, testifying his firm belief in Muhammad's Message and his Mission. Muhammad again asked him to stand down, giving a chance of a lifetime, rather eternity, of honor and grace to one of his older cousins to come forward and accept his message and take the mantle of being the successor of the Last Prophet. Only this time, there were agitated rumblings and the sharp whispers of scornful comments.

After a brief moment, Ali stood up again and in a resolute voice, asked the Prophet's permission to speak up. The Holy Prophet allowed with a nod, and Ali spoke, "O' Prophet of Allah! I'm the brave of Banu Hashim. I shall assist you and will be your vicegerent upon them."²⁴ Upon which the Holy Prophet replied, "Behold my brother, my vicegerent, and my caliph; from now on, let all listen to his words and obey him."²⁵

The speechless crowd on hearing this broke into thunderous laughter. Shaking their heads and rolling their eyes, they instantly got up and scattered away. Abu Lahab left first, taunting Abu Talib on his way out that from now on, he will be in the guardianship of his youngest son Ali. Ali was thirteen years old when he was declared the successor of the Prophet.

THE BULLIES OF MECCA

The word was out of the new faith; Othman son of Affan, one of a prominent Umayyad, accepted Islam soon after. The Qureish, especially the Umayyads, who carried an old grudge against the Hashemites, grew alarmed but due to the rock-solid support of Abu Talib, no physical harm could be done to Muhammad as it risked a family feud of unmanageable proportions, something no side wanted to take the blame for.

Abu Lahab

Abu Lahab, and his wife, who was a sister of Abu Sufyan, devised a sinister plan to give Muhammad some grief. They had two sons Utbah and Uteibah, who were married to the two girls living in Khadija's care. Their names were Umm Kulthum and Roqayaa. Abu Lahab and his wife forced their sons to divorce the girls to punish them for the supposed offenses of Khadija's husband, Muhammad. Although the girls were still living with Khadija, their marriage had taken place way before Muhammad's claim as a prophet in Mecca. Muhammad felt this pain deeply because he could never have seen Khadija disturbed on any account. Othman, son of Affan, upon seeing Prophet's disturbance, soon married Roqayaa. Roqayaa passed away shortly upon which Othman married Umm Kulthum, the other girl who had become the victim of Abu Lahab and his wife's machinations.

This plot was just the beginning. From then on, Abu Lahab and his wife turned out to be the worst enemies of the Prophet. In Mecca, Abu Lahab was the immediate neighbor of the Holy Prophet; every morning, he would collect the trash and drop it over the wall into Muhammad's house. He would gather the

insides of the animals and throw them at his doorsteps. His wife purposefully used to go out to collect the long and pointy thorny bushes to heap them at the door of Muhammad's house. When Muhammad lost his second son in infancy, Abu Lahab next door invited a huge music and dance party where he and his comrades in hatred drank to their fill torturing their grieved neighbor, the Holy Prophet Muhammad, and his wife, Khadija. He afterward started calling Muhammad with the slur of 'Abtar' meaning the 'the one whose progeny is cutoff'. They were so entrenched in their hatred that no advice of Abu Talib dissuaded them from creating troubles for the Prophet. They were eventually rebuked in the revelation of God and were made to suffer for eternity on account of their blind hatred against Muhammad and his Mission.²⁶

Abu Sufyan, the Chief of Umayyads

Abu Sufyan's real name was Sakhr. He was one of the sons of Harb, the chieftain of Banu Umayya, who had given nothing but trouble to Abd al-Muttalib, the prophet's grandfather during his lifetime. After Harb's death, Abu Sufyan became the leader of Umayyads. Not stranger from the legacy of his ancestors, he proved one of the staunchest enemies of Muhammad during his life in Mecca and Medina. He was the Instigator in Chief of Meccans' hostility towards Muhammad, to the extent that every hostile act that Muhammad, his family, or his followers had to face in Mecca or every subsequent war that was waged on Muhammad in the future, had Abu Sufyan's name written on it. Unlike Abu Lahab's impulsive atrocity, he was more of a strategic tormentor. Due to his constant chasing of the new Muslims in Mecca, the Holy Prophet had to order many of his followers to leave the city eventually. He had employed spies to keep an eye on Muhammad's visitors. Once a party of twenty Christians came to see the Holy Prophet, they accepted the new

faith and returned silently. Abu Sufyan sent men after them summoning them back to their old religion, inciting their tribal affiliations to other Yemenis, eventually threatening them with violence at the hands of their own tribesmen. Not bold enough to personally attack the Holy Prophet, he used to hire hooligans to disperse pilgrims when they used to gather to listen to the message of the Holy Prophet. He had employed the teams of Meccans' wayward youth who used to throw rocks from the random locations at the Holy Prophet as he used to go out on his daily chores in the streets of Mecca.

Among many revelations that came in censuring his actions, one came calling the whole clan of Banu Umayya the 'cursed tree'.²⁷ Rightfully so, since his great-grandfather, Abd Shams was the tormentor of Hashim, the great-grandfather of the Prophet. His grandfather Umayya was the tormentor of Prophet's grandfather Abd Al-Muttalib. His father, Harb, was the sworn enemy of Prophet's uncle Abu Talib. He was the worst adversary of the Holy Prophet and, waged over six wars on Muhammad. His son Muawiyah was the bloodthirsty enemy of Ali, who waged a year-long war against him, causing the biggest divide among Muslims. After Ali's assassination in the main mosque of Kufa, he continued his aggression against Ali's son Hassan, who he eventually had assassinated by poisoning. His grandson Yazid waged a brutal massacre against Husain, the second son of Ali, in which he managed to kill most of the men of Banu Hashim clan.

Abu Jahl

Amr, son of Hisham, belonged to Banu Makhzum clan of Qureish. Among Arabs, he was known as the 'Father of Wisdom', but the Holy Prophet gave him the title Abu Jahl, the 'Father of Ignorance', and called him the 'Pharaoh of Arabs'. He

mounted the fiercest opposition against Muhammad and was among the murderers of some of the earliest Muslims of Mecca. He was known to lead the smear campaigns and social boycott against the rich converts whom he could not physically harm, and the designated torturer, tormentor, and at times, the murderer of the poor converts of Mecca who he could destroy with impunity. He once thrashed one of his converted slaves so much that she lost her eyesight. He was also involved in multiple murder attempts on the Holy Prophet including hiring assassins to kill Muhammad.

Waleed bin al-Mughira

Waleed, son of Mughira, was the chief of the Banu Makhzum tribe and was among the main tormentors of Muhammad in Mecca. He was committed to his pagan ways to such an extreme that he had offered one of his favorite sons to Abu Talib to be taken as his slave in return for Abu Talib abandoning Muhammad for being killed by him. Another of his sons, Khalid, was among the chief captains of Meccan armies who had repeatedly attacked Muhammad in Medina. He had gathered Meccans to publicize Muhammad as a sorcerer so people would get repulsed from listening to his Message. He used to mock Muhammad openly and used to spread rumors about him and his family. His insults against Muhammad increased to such a degree that God Himself exposed Waleed in one of the divine revelations, calling him 'worthless habitual asserter, scorner, malicious gossip, preventer of good, transgressor, sinful, cruel, and a pretender of illegitimate birth'.²⁸

The quartet Abu Lahab from Banu Hashim, Abu Sufyan from Banu Umayya, and Abu Jahl and Waleed from Banu Makhzum, formed the worst opposition to the Mission of Muhammad. From hiring children to pelt rocks at the Prophet to employing

Section IV: INVITATION TO THE CLOSE RELATIVES

assassins to kill the prophet, to waging multiple wars on the Prophet, and everything in between, there was no big or small stone left unturned by these four to stop the message of Islam. Besides these four, there were others too, such as Nazr bin al-Harith who had masterminded the prophet's assassination, Umayya bin Khalf and his son Safwan who were the habitual tormentors of the Muslims belonging to the poor classes of Mecca, Ikrama son of Abu Jahl who had waged multiple wars against the Muslims, Al-'As bin Wael who was the chief propagandist against Muhammad, and Abu Sufyan's wife Hind who was famous for her bloodthirsty habits in the most literal sense. These were the committed enemies of Muhammad and his Mission from the elites of Mecca, along with their minions who sometimes were more vicious than their pagan bosses.

Section V: OPEN DECLARATION OF ISLAM

Soon after the invitation to the near relatives, the Holy Prophet openly started preaching Meccans of the new faith. The next few years in Mecca were mired with rejections, violence, exiles, and boycotts against the Holy Prophet and his small flock of adherents.

Section V: OPEN DECLARATION OF ISLAM

THE PERSECUTION BEGINS

The plot of Abu Lahab and his wife didn't manage to halt the Holy Prophet from his Mission. He with a new fervor started reaching out to old and young, men and women, in informing them of his Message and inviting them to salvation. Abu Jahl, who was the master of scorn and hateful speech, stirred up the Meccans against the Prophet on account of their affinity with their idols. Abu Sufyan and the rest of the gang hired people to chase Muhammad wherever he went to throw dirt at him from the rooftops, to spread nails and thorns in his path, to sing and beat drums whenever he would make a speech, even hiring mobsters to assault the Holy Prophet physically.

Violence against the New Converts

As time went by and all efforts to stop Muhammad proved futile, they started picking on the new converts to Islam. Those who had no family associations or were from weaker sections of society were among the most vulnerable. They were kidnapped, imprisoned, mutilated, beaten, flogged, chained, wrapped in nailed blankets only to be rot in the midday sun, even killed by the most gruesome means.

Bilal of Africa was a slave of Umayya bin Khalf who was one of the worst enemies of Muhammad in Mecca. After making his faith known, he was tortured for days in the worst manners possible. Chained in the afternoon sun, he used to be crushed under a heavy rock, his back burning against the hot, arid sand of Mecca, used to be denied water, and was physically tortured to revert to the idols of Qureish. In his anguish, he used to cry out Ahad, Ahad, the one God, the one God. On many occasions, he used to be leashed like an animal only to be dragged in the

streets of Mecca on his refusal to renounce his new faith. Muhammad managed to purchase him and set him free from Umayya.

A new convert named Lobina was a maidservant of Omar bin al-Khattab. He was a man of tall stature, in his drunkard state; he used to beat her so much that he used to get tired of beating her. Torture was mostly random and used to accompany the use of various objects that he used to utilize in beating the helpless woman. Even though tortured daily for months in random hours of days and nights without a ray of hope, she never recounted her new faith.²⁹

Yasser and his wife, Somaya, were another of those who suffered the worst form of torture. They had refused to abandon their faith and were subsequently purchased by Abu Jahl to teach them a lesson. Abu Jahl simply tortured them to death. Somaya was tied between the two camels and was killed by a spear that Abu Jahl heartlessly pierced below her navel. She became the first martyr of Islam. Their son Ammar was tortured as well and on seeing the cruel fate of his parents; seemingly recanted Islam and said good things of the idols, although, in his heart, he remained Muslim. When freed, he came crying to the Prophet, upon which the Holy Prophet consoled him with this verse of Holy Qur'an, "He who disbelieves in Allah after his belief in Him, except he who is compelled while his heart remains steadfast with the faith. But who opens his breast for infidelity; on these is the wrath of Allah, and for them is a great torment."³⁰ Ammar's brother Abd Allah was also killed along with his parents. This was the first family who was massacred only due to its faith in one God.

MUSLIMS ESCAPE TO ABYSSINIA

With so much violence perpetrated by the open enmity of the rich and powerful of Qureish, the Prophet instructed his followers to escape the city of Mecca. In the fifth year of the Mission, in 615 CE, eleven men and four women fled to Africa across the Red Sea. The Christian king of Ethiopia, Negus, or Najashi welcomed the refugees and allowed them to live in peace. Over time other Muslims, individually and in small groups, migrated to Abyssinia, a total of a hundred and sixteen Muslims migrated and remained in Abyssinia under the spiritual guidance of Jaffer, son of Abu Talib.

Ali, Abu Talib, Khadija, and a handful of Muslims stayed back in Mecca with the Holy Prophet to support his Mission.

Meccan delegation to capture the migrants back

Abu Sufyan, furious at the escape of the Muslims and now beyond the tyranny of Qureish, formed a hasty delegation of Meccan nobles to bring the escapees back. Two notable Umayyads, Amr bin al-Aas and Abd Allah bin Umayya, rushed to Abyssinia. Upon reaching the court of the king, they prostrated before him and presented the expensive gifts they had brought along. Then they opened their Mission by praising the king, reminding him of the personal friendships he had with some of the Qureish, and explained that some of their tribesmen had adopted a new faith and had become heretics of the religion of their ancestors. Then they demanded their return so they could be dealt with accordingly.

King Negus, upon this request, summoned the Muslim migrants to his court. Once entered, no Muslim prostrated to him, instead greeted him with customary Muslim greetings of 'Peace

be upon you'. The King watched this in amusement and asked them to present their case. Jaffer, the elder brother of Ali, recounted the oppression that the poor and destitute faced in current day Mecca and introduced the King to the grace of Holy Prophet, who had appeared in Mecca and had brought along the monotheistic ideology and the humane laws with him.

Qur'an recitation in the Court of the Christian King

Upon seeing the king tilting in favor of Muslims, Amr implored the king to ask them about Jesus and his mother, who he knew Muslims didn't believe as divine. The just king wished Jaffer bin Abi Talib to recite some passages from the Qur'an, on which Jaffer duly recited the verses from the chapter named after Mary, the mother of Jesus.³¹ The verses of the 'Chapter of Maryam' talked about the holy birth of Jesus from the Virgin Mary, the speaking of Jesus from his cradle, and the Message of Jesus, similar to the Message of the Prophet of Islam.

King Negus was greatly moved by hearing the word of God, with tears in his eyes, he refused the demand of the delegation of Qureish, returned their gifts, and allowed the Muslims to remain in his kingdom in peace. A short while later, the King himself accepted Islam without announcing it to his courtiers in order to remain among his countrymen.

SPECIAL PROTOCOLS FOR THE BIRTH OF FATIMA

God's merciful wish was to reward Muhammad with Fatima for all of his hardships that he had been enduring for His Mission. 615 CE³² was the year when Fatima, the eminent daughter of the Holy Prophet, was born. God had established special physical and metaphysical protocols before her special birth.

The forty-day vigil

Angel Gabriel descended to the Holy Prophet, and after proper salutations asked, "O' Muhammad, The Most Exalted sends His peace upon you and commands you to refrain from Khadija for forty days." The Prophet abiding by the command summoned Ammar bin Yasser and instructed him to inform Khadija that this separation was not due to him forsaking or abandoning her. Rather it was God Himself who had ordered him to do so and that it was Him who praises her several times a day due to her devotion in serving His Mission.

Veneration by the Angles

The Prophet spent the next forty days in fasting and forty nights in praying. At the end of the fortieth day, the archangel Gabriel again descended and said, "O' Muhammad, The Most Exalted sends His peace upon you and commands you to be prepared for His salutation and gift." At that moment, the angel Michael descended with a covered platter and presented it to Muhammad. Gabriel said to him, "O Muhammad, your Lord commands you to break your fast with this food tonight." Ali says of this event that before this night, the Prophet used to order him to open his doors at the time of breaking the fast so others could join in the dinner table. But that night, the Holy

Prophet ordered Ali to close the doors and guard instead and said, “O son of Abu Talib, this food is forbidden for everyone except me.”

Then Muhammad ate from the platter until he was satisfied. After the platter was ascended back to heavens, he performed ablution and prepared himself for the nightly non-mandatory prayers, as was his routine. Upon this, Gabriel said to the Prophet, “These prayers are forbidden to you tonight until you go to Khadija, for God ordained to create noble progeny from you.”³³

Muhammad and Khadija reunite

Khadija says that as the night fell, she closed the doors, dropped the curtains, performed her nightly prayers, and went to sleep in her bed. A little while later, she heard the Prophet’s knock on the door. She opened the door, and there was Muhammad. It used to be his routine to perform special prayers before going to bed, but that night he said he was ordered not to.

Birth of Fatima turned out to be a huge blessing for the couple. God had ordained her to be an anchor in the preservation of the Mission of the Prophet. The events decades later proved that when the Mission entered into its most vulnerable phase, children born from her progeny sustained the Mission, continued Muhammad’s revolution, and preserved the absolute Last Message of God at the expense of their own destruction.

ABU TALIB'S REFUSAL TO ABANDON MUHAMMAD

In the sixth year of the Mission, the Holy Prophet took residence in the house of one of his new converts named Arqam. House of Arqam was strategically located very close to the Ka'ba and was an ideal place to preach to the incoming pilgrims as they used to hang around in the markets and streets adjacent to Ka'ba. The Qureish meanwhile were incensed at their embarrassing failure in the court of King Negus and were on the lookout for an opportunity to hit back at Muhammad.

Abu Sufyan unsuccessfully wooing Abu Talib

But before that, they had to remove the protection somehow that Muhammad enjoyed under the wings of his powerful uncle, Abu Talib. Abu Sufyan assembled a delegation of Meccan leaders to meet with Abu Talib and to offer him and Muhammad major concessions to have them give up on his Mission. The second option given was to at least have Abu Talib abandon his protection of Muhammad so they could deal with him directly.

The Qureishite delegation came up with the most absurd of the concessions, throwing the light on their mindset and what little they were grasping of Muhammad's Mission so far. Through Abu Talib, they offered Muhammad essentially a ridiculous bribe, which included huge sums of gold and silver, appointing him as the king of Mecca, and marrying him to any and as many women of Arabia as he wished. Abu Talib himself, an honorable person, had to deliver this message no matter how absurd it sounded to him.

On being informed of the offer, Muhammad responded with a resolve that: "Had they placed the sun on my right hand and moon on the left, I would not abandon this Mission." On hearing this, the proud uncle confirmed his unwavering support to his distinguished nephew and hushed away the Qureishite delegation empty-handed. Waleed on hearing the refusal came to Muhammad one day offering him a shared religion in which the 'pagans would share the God of the Muhammad and Muhammad would share the deities of the pagans'. As Waleed was patting himself over such a 'brilliant' offer, God revealed a convincing reply to this to close the door of such mixed ideologies for eternity.³⁴

Around the same time, the pagan guard in Mecca suffered another two setbacks. One was the conversion of Hamza bin Abd al-Muttalib who was a knight of Banu Hashim and was known for his integrity, valor, and wisdom. The other was of Omar who up until now had been the staunchest enemy of Muhammad but other than beating up a few weak converts; he hadn't had much to his resume'. Both were high impact conversions for Qureish because Hamza was the brother of Abu Talib, another powerful protector of the Prophet in Mecca, and Omar was the nephew of Abu Jahl, the vicious bully of Mecca.

Hamza bin Abd al-Muttalib declares Islam

One day, the Holy Prophet was preaching near Ka'ba when Abu Jahl passed by. On seeing the Prophet by himself, he felt emboldened. As the flocks of pilgrims were passing by, he started hurling the worst forms of insults on Muhammad and his monotheist ancestors. The Prophet didn't find it appropriate to respond to his heckling, but his foul language and sharp tongue offended him deeply.

On the same afternoon, Hamza, the uncle of the Prophet, was returning from a hunting expedition when someone narrated to him the whole incident. Hamza, in rage, dropped his hunt and rushed to find Abu Jahl, who was still somewhere around Ka'ba, recounting his successful scoop over the Prophet. As he saw Hamza, he sheepishly went ahead to greet him, thinking to tell Hamza of his side of events, but Hamza hurriedly approached him, struck him with his bow so hard that Abu Jahl started bleeding on his forehead. He then challenged Abu Jahl to retaliate against him right then and there if he thought of himself to be so brave. Knowing too well the valor of Hamza, Abu Jahl like any other bully, found it convenient to mumble away while escaping that 'he insulted Muhammad only because Muhammad had insulted his gods'. On which Hamza vehemently cursed his wooden gods in front of him, followed by declaring his faith in Muhammad as the messenger of one immaculate God.³⁵

While Abu Jahl scurried away thanking his deities for his dear life, Hamza promptly reached in the audience of Muhammad and testified his belief in the Oneness of God and the Prophecy of the Holy Prophet. The Prophet at once thanked God for his salvation and welcomed Hamza in his sacred fold.

Circumstances of Omar's Islam

A few days later, another conversion happened on a different note. The migration of Abyssinia had already completed, and those who had to leave Mecca had already gone.

Like Abu Jahl, once Omar found out that most of the city of Mecca was emptied of Muhammad's followers, he got emboldened. With a drawn-out sword in his hand, Omar set out to rid Muhammad once and for all. On his way to the House of

Arqam, he met a friend of his who had already accepted Islam. On knowing the intentions of Omar, he said, "By God, you have fooled yourself, O' Omar! Do you think that Banu Abd Manaf would let you go free when they found out who killed their son Muhammad?" As Omar was backing off scared, his friend advised him to learn from his sister, who had already seen the light. Omar, realizing that there was nothing he could do to Muhammad, instantly changed course and descended on his sister's house, who incidentally was reciting some verses of Qur'an at the time. Barging in, he crazily started punching his brother in law. His sister intervened; he started hitting her too until she started bleeding profusely and fell.

Feeling embarrassed now at his uncalled for rage, he calmed down and asked her to show what was it that she was reading? She refused to hand it over to Omar, saying that Omar was impure and hence, unfit to touch the verses of the Qur'an. Omar kept forcing her and she kept refusing; finally, he gave in and washed up his body. Upon which, his sister let him carry and read some passages of the Qur'an. Reading the scripture, Omar started crying, and impulsively declared his belief that Muhammad was the true messenger of God. He was thirty-nine years old when he had converted. He belonged to the Banu Makhzum tribe of Qureish and was a nephew of Abu Jahl.³⁶

SANCTIONS ON BANU HASHIM

After being humiliated by Abu Talib, the Qureish were at a loss of how to stop the message of Muhammad, which was spreading fast among the rich and poor of Mecca. Even the young children were talking about the revolution that had taken over the Meccan landscape. The most unlearned and downtrodden people of the community were questioning the ways of their ancestors and their practices of worshipping the hand-carved figurines made of rock and lumber. The whole despotic structure of the elite clans of Arabia was coming under scrutiny, and most of all, Abu Sufyan was sensing the mortal danger knocking at the doors of the old guard of Mecca.

Covenant of the collective punishment

In 616 CE, during the seventh year of the Mission, due to the persistently malignant lobbying of Abu Sufyan, a covenant of collective punishment was manufactured by the powerful tribes of Mecca. This covenant called for banning all sorts of interaction with the clan of Banu Hashim. The covenant was placed inside the Ka'ba to make it religiously binding over all of the citizens of Mecca.

The covenant forced Meccans to cease all purchases to and from the clan of Banu Hashim, breaking off all existing monetary contracts, disallowing anyone marrying into Banu Hashim, banning of all communal activities with Banu Hashim, even a complete blockade of supplies of food and basic provisions was enforced. Essentially this was the worst form of social and economic blockade Meccans had enforced on such a large scale.

Anticipating the mortal danger to Muhammad in such an antagonistic atmosphere, Abu Talib moved Muhammad and

Khadija to his fortified sanctuary of She'b Abi Talib. The clansmen of Banu Hashim, refusing to deliver Muhammad to his lethal enemies, also moved to the sanctuary with him. Abu Lahab was the only member of the Banu Hashim clan who ditched his family in favor of his Umayyad in-laws.

The severity of the blockade

The blockade was enforced with extreme savagery. There used to be constant roadblocks around the sanctuary to stop Banu Hashim from purchasing provisions from the outsiders of Mecca. Any economic activity was impossible, the meager supplies they used to manage to purchase used to come at hiked prices as even the non-Meccan Arabs found in this an opportunity to punish Banu Hashim. Of the four sacred months, only the months of Rajab and Dhu al-Hijjah were allocated as truce days for Hashemites. Even during these days, when they could venture out in relative safety, the merchants of Mecca used to refuse them to sell their goods. Sanction days were indeed very tough for the Banu Hashim and for Muhammad himself. Men, women, children, old and sick, every member of the Banu Hashim clan was suffering in many ways. Starvations were common, young, sick, and old suffered along with everybody. These days were so rough that many times parents had to boil the articles made from the hide of the animals to feed something to the crying children. Due to the possibility of the surprise assassinations, Abu Talib used to replace the Prophet's bed every random night with one of his sons. Even with so much destitution and suffering, Hashemites were steadfastly enduring these hardships for the greater good of the Mission of Muhammad.

Muhammad, not forgetting his purpose, used to venture out to preach the pilgrims under the careful watch of Abu Talib and his

sons, either during the truce days or during the bold procurement ventures that Abu Talib used to carry out clandestinely. The danger of physical harm was always lurking near.

Absent were the Non-Hashemite Muslims

It's a sad fact that many of his followers, who became the stalwarts of Islamic cause after the demise of the Holy Prophet claiming their ancient friendships with him, were nowhere to be seen during these extreme hardship years of Muhammad and his clansmen. Over time, even the pagan Meccans were divided into two groups, one distraught and other rejoicing the cries of the starved children of Banu Hashim that could be heard from the outskirts of Mecca now. The brutal sanctions lasted for three years, beginning in the seventh year of the Mission and ending in the tenth.

The miraculous ending of the Sanctions

In the tenth year of the Mission, the Holy Prophet informed his affectionate uncle that God had disapproved the blockade and the divine sign was that the termites had devoured the paper on which the covenant was written but sparing the name of Allah that was written by its authors as a seal of the covenant. Abu Talib, being a firm believer in his nephew's divine prophecy, soon approached Abu Sufyan and his gang and told them of the fate of the covenant. Demanding to end the blockade had Muhammad's prognosis turned out to be true and offering to personally handover Muhammad had it been false; Abu Talib had made a compelling case to end the hostilities. Some notable Meccans, although not believers yet, out of their guilt on hearing the cries of the children of Banu Hashim, pledged to support Abu Talib's plea. They accompanied Abu Talib, so his just demand was not overturned. Abu Sufyan and others

grudgingly agreed and went to Ka'ba to inspect the document. On opening the locked doors of Ka'ba, the first sight they had of the punishing covenant was a shredded parchment hanging by a thread, eaten out by the termites at all the places where the savage sentences of the treaty were written, the seal devoured up, and only the name of Allah left intact.

Abu Sufyan called it sorcery of Muhammad and refused the annulment, but on insistent of the Meccan elders that Abu Talib had carried with him, he had to abide by the demands. The blockade was removed, Hashemites returned to their empty homes, and Muhammad was again free to fulfill his Mission.

Section VI: THE NEW ALLIANCES

In the tenth year of the Mission, Muhammad suffered the loss of his beloved uncle Abu Talib and his dear wife, Khadija. Their demise exposed the Holy Prophet to the worst form of hostility that Meccans could dish out to him for the next four years. Hostilities turned so violent that eventually, he, along with most of his supporters, had to escape Mecca for good.

Section VI: THE NEW ALLIANCES

THE YEAR OF MOURNING

Muhammad was fifty years old, and the year was 619 CE. It had been ten years since the first revelation had instructed the Holy Prophet to commence his Mission. Meanwhile, Hashemites were slowly rebuilding their lives that had been so viscously disrupted by the three years of sanctions.

Loss of Abu Talib

During this time, when the Hashemites needed a seasoned leader who could reclaim their prestigious privileges around Ka'ba and restore their commercial and social networks in Mecca, they lost their famed leader. Due to the impoverishment caused by the three-year-long siege, Abu Talib passed away at the patriarchal age of eighty-seven years old. For the Holy Prophet, it was more than a personal loss; his Mission had lost its shield against the shrewd leadership of Qureish. Over the years, Abu Talib had painstakingly shielded Muhammad through wisely maneuvering tribal affiliations, compromises, and understandings.

On a personal level, he was the only father Muhammad ever knew. For the past forty-two years, Muhammad was in the guardianship and protection of Abu Talib. Even during those childhood years when Muhammad had briefly lived under the care of his mother, Amena and then grandfather Abd al-Muttalib, he was essentially surrogated by his uncle, Abu Talib. This was precisely the reason that Abd al-Muttalib had so wisely entrusted Abu Talib with Muhammad. His love for Muhammad as his nephew and his devotion to Muhammad as his Prophet were not hidden from anybody. Once during Muhammad's childhood, a month-long drought had hit Mecca. Abu Talib

carrying Muhammad in his lap, took him to Ka'ba and, exposing his face to the heavens, made a prayer for the rain, which was immediately answered, and the draught ended. Recalling this occasion years later, Abu Talib composed this poetry, which is still preserved in the literary pages of history.

*I believe that Muhammad's faith
is the best of the religions of the universe
Don't you see that we have found in Muhammad
a Prophet like Moses
His is the illuminated face
which is the medium for the rains
He is spring for the orphans
and protector for the widows
People who tried his virtuous worth
could find none like him among humankind
Gentle, virtuous, wise and prudent
He whom he loves is not indifferent to him
To exalt him, He derived his name from His own
The One on High is called Mahmud,
while He named him Muhammad*

Khadija's demise

The second casualty of the cruel siege on Banu Hashim was Khadija. Within the same month of Abu Talib's death, his beloved wife, Khadija, passed away. The fruit of their marriage, their daughter Fatima was only four years old then.

Muhammad wept bitterly at her grave and clothed himself in the mourning attire for her and Abu Talib's loss, calling this year, the Aam al-Huzn, the 'Year of Mourning'³⁷ Khadija was the main monetary backer of his Mission and one of the biggest

moral supporters Muhammad had in Mecca. They were together for twenty-five years, during which they happily endured the ups and downs of his Mission. Islam, Qur'an, and Ali were brought up in her motherly lap. She was most affectionately called the 'Mother of Believers' by the poor and vulnerable converts of Mecca and later on titled such in Qur'an. Muhammad used to say about her, "She believed in me when the whole world refuted me, and she attested to my veracity when the whole world accused me of falsehood. She offered me compassion and loyalty with her wealth when everyone else had forsaken me."

During Khadija's last days, she was completely bedridden. One day the Holy Prophet said to her: "What you are enduring is because of us O' Khadija; when you meet your peers, send my Salaam to them!" Khadija questioned: "Who are they; O Prophet of God?" He answered: "Mary, daughter of Imran, Miriam sister of Moses, and Asiya, the wife of Pharaoh."

Muhammad buried her in Mecca in the graveyard named the Jannat al-Mu'alla.

IN SEARCH OF THE TENDER HEARTS

With a heavy heart at these losses, the Holy Prophet continued preaching in Mecca, but with the absence of the ironclad support of Abu Talib, his adversaries were turning more vicious by the day. Rejected by his own people, he set out to the city of Ta'if, about sixty miles east of Mecca, hoping to find the fertile grounds elsewhere for his message.

Preaching in the city of Ta'if

The city was a major stronghold of idol worshippers. Al-Lat, the patron idol of the tribe of Banu Thaqif, adorned with jewels and precious stones used to be worshipped there. Muhammad arrived there with Zaid bin Haritha and stayed for a little over a week. There he met with the leaders of the city first and invited them to Islam but was rebuked very harshly. They instead instigated the common citizens of Ta'if to attack him physically wherever he ventured. One day as the Holy Prophet went out to preach in the markets of Ta'if, he was such pelted with rocks and debris that his shoes were filled with blood as he sought refuge in an orchard. A Christian slave working there tended to him seeing him bloodied and wounded. On being asked the reason for such violence, Muhammad informed him about his Divine Mission. The kind-hearted slave, upon recognizing the truth of his message, reverted to Islam.

The cowardice of the Non-Hashemite Muslims

After a few days, Muhammad, battered and exhausted, returned to Mecca. Here another struggle was waiting for him. After Abu Talib, the clan of Banu Hashim was considerably weakened and was already in the crosshairs of the powerful clan of Banu Umayya. In this complete political isolation of his

clansmen, he could surely be assassinated if found walking in the city. Before entering the city, he had to secure someone's safety guaranty for the protection of his life.

With Banu Hashim's political weight rendered ineffectual, Ali and Hamza tried to enlist non-Hashemite Muslims to form a protection force for the Holy Prophet, but except for a few poor ones, nobody came forward. Non-Hashemite Muslims, although over a hundred and fifty strong by now, were too scared to help their own Prophet. After the three-year-long siege of Banu Hashim, this was the second occasion when many of his own disciples had disappointed him by not coming to his aid when he needed them the most.

Here he was, standing helplessly at the outskirts of Mecca, already consumed by the barbaric assaults of the people of Ta'if for past one week, thoroughly exposed to a possible life attempt by any random Meccan; and there was not one daring soul from his flock to welcome him safely in his town except for Ali and Hamza.

Muhammad ended up sending Zaid bin Haritha to a few honorable men left in Mecca, to secure his safety guaranty. One among them was Mut'im bin Adi, chief of the Banu Nawfal clan. Still a polytheist, he pledged to transport Muhammad back in the town securely. Marching with his clansmen, wearing their battle garb, Mut'im escorted Muhammad back in the city and had him stay in his own home.

After the strangely muted response of three years of the most brutally enforced siege of Banu Hashim in She'b Abi Talib, this was another display of extreme cowardice of the Muslims belonging to other tribes of Mecca. By this time, Othman bin Affan had already returned from Abyssinia, Omar had already

converted, and Abu Bakr was also in Mecca; yet the Holy Prophet had to end up relying either on his own clan of Banu Hashim, which was already at the brink of an open war with the rest of Mecca or the other brave and conscientious pagans for his safety.

A GOD SENT ALLIANCE

During the eleventh year of the Mission in 620 CE, when the Holy Prophet was sermonizing people at the place of Aqaba, few men of the Banu al-Khazraj tribe from the city of Medina overheard the message of the Holy Prophet. On listening to the lofty ideals of the new faith, they immediately embraced Islam. They took the Prophet's Message with them and publicized the new religion to their kindred in Medina. The next year, a few more men, along with a few from the last year, came to visit the Holy Prophet. Before their return, they pledged the Prophet of their belief in the doctrine of monotheism and their adherence to the moral code of Islam. Their pledge was known as the 'First Pledge of Aqaba'. The Holy Prophet tagged with them one of his cousins and another sincere follower from Mecca to teach them Qur'an.

Ascension to the Heavens

The Holy Prophet was at his cousin's place that night. Umm Hani, the daughter of Abu Talib, used to host her family members at her home. The Prophet had just finished his nightly prayers. It was the night of the 27th of Rajab, in the twelfth year of the Mission. Angel Gabriel descended to him and took him to Ka'ba, brought him a ride called Boraq, and took him to Jerusalem, where they descended at the temple. After leading the congregation of all of the past prophets, the Holy Prophet was ascended to the heavens, where he was shown parallel realms of heaven, hell, and other wonders of the celestial creations of God. During the journey, a station came where only the Holy Prophet could proceed, and the archangel Gabriel had to stay back. Among the various precepts and orders, the five prayers were made incumbent upon his people. There he saw

his name inscribed together with that of Ali, “There is no god but One God, and Muhammad is His Prophet with Ali as his Right Hand.”³⁸

Having honored such, the Prophet was carried back to Umm Hani’s residence only to find out that his journey didn’t take him more than a moment on this planet earth. The water of the ablution was still flowing at the ground, and the chain on the door was still swinging as he came back from his celestial journey. This night is called The Night of Ascension, the ‘Laylat al-Isra wa al-Me’raj.’³⁹

The next morning, the Holy Prophet informed his family, the children of Abu Talib, about his celestial journey and what he saw of Ali’s special status next to him in the presence of God. They all congratulated Ali and thanked God for the high rank that had been bestowed on both Muhammad and Ali and through them on their family. Later, when the Holy Prophet informed outsiders of his miraculous journey, some remained silent while others doubted whether it was only a spiritual ascent; Abu Bakr was an exception from the outsiders who readily accepted the journey as the bodily ascent of the Holy Prophet. Everybody from Qureish refuted him altogether; some, as usual, ridiculing him on this claim.

Faith finds the City of Medina

Meanwhile, far way in Medina, Mus’ab bin Omair and Abd Allah bin Umm Maktum were having great successes in preaching the new faith to its inhabitants. Incidentally, Mus’ab was a cousin of the Holy Prophet, and Abd Allah was a cousin of Khadija; the pair having family ties with the Prophet was proving to be a great example for the people of Medina of the mannerisms of the Holy Prophet’s closed ones. Their hard work was paying off;

in the thirteenth year of the Mission, in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, seventy-three men and two women from the tribes of Banu Khazraj and Banu Aws visited Mecca.

Upon their arrival, they immediately paid a visit to the Holy Prophet, a yearning they must have carried in their hearts since the day they had accepted their new faith and had devoted themselves in the service of the Prophet of God, the merciful Muhammad. It was decided to meet the day after the ritual sacrifice of Hajj again. In this meeting, called the 'Second Pledge of Aqaba', the Holy Prophet took Abbas, his uncle with him, who was the new leader of Banu Hashim after Abu Talib's demise and was officially the new protector of Muhammad.

Muslims of Medina pledged their unconditional support to the Messenger and his Mission, formally placing their hands on Prophet's and asking in return that Prophet would never forsake them. The Holy Prophet, on his part, assured them that henceforth, he would consider himself as one of them, bound by trust, blood, and interest. Abbas watching the pledge ceremony, reckoned that Muhammad's migration from Mecca was all but certain. He solemnly handed his responsibility of protecting Muhammad to his new allies from Medina.

The Meccan spies got the news of the pledge. The next day, when the bands of believers were returning, they were chased, but the Qureish couldn't manage to capture anyone. Nonetheless, the Qureish leadership was spooked by the idea of Muhammad's message gaining traction in the areas beyond their sphere of influence.

The Exodus begins

Pledge of Aqaba secured the Holy Prophet a safe haven for Meccan Muslims among his new followers in Medina. As soon

as the permission came from God, the Prophet gave the signal to the Muslims of Mecca to start their exodus. On Prophet's instructions, they were to leave the city discretely. They formed small groups with meager provisions so as to travel fast and light, mostly left the city at night, by foot, leaving their rooms or houses in a state where nobody could be alarmed.

Omar, with twenty others of his party, moved out of the city in full public display, breaking the cover of the others. This infuriated the Qureish, who were already on the edge as they were seeing their empire of polytheism crumbling right in front of their eyes. Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, a few other women of the Prophet's household, and Abu Bakr were left to face the brunt of this unnecessary show of pomp.

The order came in the spring of the thirteenth year of the Mission; before the summer arrived, around one hundred and fifty Meccan Muslims had already reached the safety of Medina.

Section VII: MIGRATION TO MEDINA

In the thirteenth year of the Mission, Muhammad arrived in the city of Medina, and a new chapter of his divine Mission began. The Prophet was fifty-three years old. His Migration was famously called the 'Hijra'. The Hijra made Medina his new home and the capital of his newly founded Kingdom of God.

THE MURDER PLOT

While the appeal of Muhammad's Message was shaking the very foundations of the order of polytheism entrenched in Mecca, the pagan leadership was running out of ideas to finish off with Islam. With Abu Talib out of the way, this was the most opportune time for the pagan leadership to strike Muhammad before he could escape from their reach for good. They thought of a sinister plan to get rid of the Prophet once and for all.

The secret plan

Information on the Prophet's visit to Ta'if and his winning the followers in Medina was like a bolt of lightning for the custodians of idolatry. In Abu Sufyan's calculations, the revolution of Muhammad was soon growing beyond what Qureish could quell at their local level; the stage was set for the final and decisive blow by the pagan mafia.

As Muslims had emptied Mecca, Abu Sufyan and his band secretly assembled to finalize the details of the strike. All options were put on the table including imprisonment for life and banning him from entering any of the cities of Arabia, but the plan they unanimously agreed to, that which Abu Jahl had proposed, was to gather forty expert swordsmen, at least one from each clan and ambush Muhammad in his own home. The idea was that Banu Hashim would be too powerless to avenge Muhammad's blood from the grand alliance of Meccans and would be forced to settle for a ransom payment. The secret plan was put into motion right away, the team of assassins was assembled the same day, the swords sharpened, spears tightened, logistics readied, and a bigger number of men were

put on standby to absorb the fall back had Banu Hashim chose to hit back.

Plot busted

The angel Gabriel appeared to the Holy Prophet the same day the assassination plan was put into motion and communicated him the permission of God to leave the city of Mecca on that very night. The verses revealed in this regard were, “And when those who disbelieved plotted against you to restrain you, to kill you, or to expel you. But they planned and Allah plans. And Allah is the best of the planners.”⁴⁰ On receiving the commandment, the Prophet quietly sent orders to the remaining Muslims in Mecca to stay in their homes at night while asking Ali to sleep in his bed that night and put over his green cloak. The decoy was all set; in the event the murder attempt was successful, assassins were to kill Ali instead of Muhammad.

The narrow escape

Muhammad set out of his home as the darkness of the night settled in the streets of Mecca. As he walked a few corners, he saw Abu Bakr standing outside. Muhammad brought him along. A few more streets and he found some armed men walking down the street. He whispered some verses of the Qur'an,⁴¹ took a pinch of dust from the ground, and blew towards them; they couldn't spot the Prophet. Hidden from the eyes of his enemies, the Holy Prophet finally exited the city and headed in the direction away from Medina. He knew the roads towards Medina would soon be littered with bounty hunters and opportunistic raiders. In a short while, they reached a rocky summit called the Mount Thowr. Not much high up in the mountain, they found a cavern, barely wide enough to enter one person at a time. Abu Bakr hurried in first cleaning it from

inside; Muhammad entered later. As they settled in, a spider made a thick web on the entrance, and a pigeon laid eggs next to the opening of the cavern. From outside the cavern, it looked all but untouched by any human.

The ambush begins

Meanwhile, back in Mecca, Ali was peacefully sleeping in Prophet's bed covered in Prophet's cloak. Nobody could tell that Muhammad had already left the house, and it was Ali who was offering himself for the sharp swords of Qureish. The assassin party quietly surrounded the house. Through the crack of the door, they could see a man carelessly sleeping wrapped in a green blanket. They spent some considerable time whispering how best to launch the attack while on every passing moment, the Prophet was walking farther away from them, undetected. Finally, they kicked the door open and rushed towards the bed. Ali, on hearing the commotion, calmly woke up. On seeing Ali instead of Muhammad, they inquired in anger, "Where is Muhammad?" "I know not," replied Ali in a steely voice as he leisurely walked away. Attackers baffled and with no further instructions from their ringleaders, left Ali unharmed and returned, wondering who could have disclosed their top-secret plan to Muhammad.

Praising Ali giving preference to Muhammad's life over his own, God revealed the verse, "And from men, there is one who sells his soul for the sake of seeking the pleasure of Allah, and Allah is extremely gracious to men like these."⁴²

Futile search

The Qureish were bewildered as to how Muhammad knew of their secret plot. Bounty hunters were called in; the reward of one hundred camels was announced for anybody capturing

Muhammad, dead or alive. Within a few hours, homes of Banu Hashim were raided, Mecca's surroundings were combed through, and detectives were sent in all directions. Even the holy sanctuary of Ka'ba was unlocked and searched. Around noontime, a raiding party reached close to the cavern where Muhammad had taken refuge. The Prophet could hear their footsteps and the ruffle of their garments as they walked over and around Mount Thowr. Abu Bakr in panic started crying and inquired the Prophet, "What if our pursuers find us out? We are but two!" The Prophet calmed him down, reminding him that God is with them.

At one point, the scouts reached right next to the cavern's mouth. Standing within a yard of them, someone suggested searching inside the cave, but others, more likely drained by the fruitless runaround since early morning, brushed him aside and left.

The journey continues

They stayed in the cavern for three days. At the end of the third day, Ali brought them a camel with a guide to get them to Medina through an obscure path. They started as soon as it was dark. On the second day of the journey, they noticed a fast approaching rider following them. This was Soraqa bin Malik, a renowned bounty hunter; as Abu Bakr saw him catching up fast, he panicked, saying, "We are done."⁴³ The Prophet again calmed him down and reassured him by telling him to trust in God alone. Meanwhile, the stallion Soraqa was riding halted suddenly. Soraqa kept on pulsing and kicking his horse, but it appeared frozen as if the earth had grasped its hooves. On seeing this miracle, Soraqa begged for forgiveness and vowed not to disclose the Prophet's location to anyone. The merciful prophet allowed him to go free; he returned to Mecca and a

Section VII: MIGRATION TO MEDINA

few days later recounted this miracle to the Meccans, who scolded him badly for informing them so late about this incident.

WAITING FOR ALI AT QOBA

The Prophet continued and arrived safely in Qoba on the twelfth day of Rabi al-Awwal, a suburb two miles from the city of Medina. In Qoba, his camel stopped on its own accord at a place called Al-Taqwa, here the Prophet camped in the house of Sa'd bin Khathima. Abu Bakr was ordered to keep marching on; he reached Medina and stayed in the house of a Medinite Muslim named Khabib.

Muhammad pauses for Ali's arrival

Here the Holy Prophet waited for the arrival of Ali and the rest of his family before entering the city of Medina. Although he had to flee his home in the danger of imminent assassination, Muhammad hadn't ignored the wealth, the deeds, and the contracts that polytheist Meccans had secured with him for safekeeping. Such was the character of Muhammad that although for the good part of the past thirteen years, he was designated the enemy number one by the Meccans, they still believed in the title of Al-Ameen he had earned from his fellow citizens. As he had to leave Mecca, he consigned all of these trusts in the hands of his successor Ali.

Ali safely executed Muhammad's responsibilities on his behalf and headed to Medina. He brought with him the remaining family members, Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad, his own mother, Fatima bint Asad, and their cousin Fatima bint Zubair.

The First Mosque

As soon as his family arrived in Qoba, the Holy Prophet set out to build the first mosque of Islam. Muhammad had Ali mounted a camel to ride out to mark the boundaries of the mosque. The Prophet himself laid the foundation stone and marked the

direction of Ka'ba. The small patch of land was cleared and leveled, and a humble hall was built, supported by the mud-plastered walls. The first mosque of Islam was ready for the prayer congregations for all times to come.

The First Friday Congregation

The news of Muhammad's arrival had reached Medina and its surroundings. The whole city started preparing the befitting welcome for the Prophet of Islam. On Friday, the sixteenth of Rabi al-Awwal, the Holy Prophet left Qoba and headed towards Medina. Along with him were Ali, his daughter Fatima, the rest of his family, and a few Meccan Muslims who had recently migrated to Medina. On their way, another seventy Medinite Muslims joined the procession.

Somewhere in between Qoba and Medina, the Holy Prophet made a brief stop at the small township of Ranuna. Here the Holy Prophet performed the first Friday congregation prayer along with his flock of Muslims from Medina and Mecca. From that day onwards, Friday became the congregation prayer day for the whole Muslim nation.

MEDINA THE NEW HOME

After the Friday prayer completed, Muhammad got up, climbed his camel, and in a huge procession of his devotees headed towards Medina. Hundreds of people gathered on the roadside. Those who came welcoming the Prophet were the local inhabitants of Medina, along with the people of the surrounding areas, including the Muslims and others. Everybody wanted to see the face of the person who was ruling so many hearts living so far away from his lovers. Women and children were singing the welcome songs from the rooftops; men were lining the streets, their hands up high in the air pledging their support to the Holy Prophet. People were yelling the praises of God and His Prophet for gracing their city with his presence. Although the Prophet had let everybody know that he would stay wherever his camel would stop on its own will, yet elders of each tribe were begging him to stay in one of their homes.

His camel proceeded to the eastern part of Medina and knelt in an open courtyard with some palm trees in it. Incidentally, this courtyard was in the quarter of the Banu Najjar clan of Medina. This was the same clan where about a hundred years ago, his legendary grandfather, the famed chief of Mecca Abd al-Muttalib had spent his childhood. Salma, the mother of Abd al-Muttalib, belonged to the Banu Najjar clan of the Banu Khazraj tribe. The same courtyard also hosted the grave of the Prophet's father, Abd Allah. He had passed away here in the Banu Najjar tribe a few months before the birth of his first and only child Muhammad. This courtyard was adjacent to the house of Khalid bin Zaid popularly known as Abu Ayyub Ansari. At the time, Abu Ayyub was the head of the Banu Najjar clan.

Abu Ayyub was delighted to host the Prophet and was grateful to the merciful God for having been honored such. For the next seven months, Muhammad, along with Ali and the rest of his family, took up temporary residence in Abu Ayyub Ansari's house.

Medina tul-Nabi that was Yathrib

Medina used to be called Yathrib until the day the Prophet arrived there. After his arrival, people started calling it Medina tul-Nabi, the 'City of the Prophet', which shortened overtime into Medina. The city of Medina is still called Medina al-Monawira or the 'Illuminated City' in the Islamic text. It used to be an oasis in western Arabia, situated in the most fertile part of Hijaz with two major tribes Banu Aws and Banu Khazraj inhabiting the city and mostly at war with each other. Up until the Holy Prophet's arrival in the city, these two tribes were at war for the past one hundred and twenty years. From the three major Jewish tribes of Medina, Banu Nadir and Banu Qurayza were allied with Banu Aws and the Banu Qaynuqa with Banu Khazraj.

Muhajirun and Ansaar

The Muslims who had migrated from Mecca were called Muhajirun, literally the 'Migrants'. The Ansaar meaning the 'Helpers' were the locals of Medina who had welcomed the Meccan Muslims in their city. From now on, these two groups were known for these designations. The title Ansari, 'from helpers' was used as the honorary surname for Medinite Muslims later on.

Section VIII: MEDINA, THE KINGDOM OF GOD

As the Holy Prophet settled in Medina, his Mission entered into a new, more global phase. He had to teach his people how the lofty ideals of monotheism provided a system of collective salvation for a nation that extrapolated from a relatively simple system of an individual's success in this world and the next. He had to demonstrate it by governing the city-state of Medina by the laws of God.

ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY CENTER

In Medina, the Holy Prophet moved swiftly with establishing institutions and traditions that would serve as a model for the future generations of Muslims. The revolution that he had started with the first divine revelation in Mecca in a small cave in Jabal al-Nour had turned a new page once he entered the city of Medina. Muslims had so far savored only the individual level flavor of Islam; they had yet to experience the fruits of communal Islam, where the society as a whole could practice monotheism and reap the benefits of its social and communal tenets.

Masjid al-Nabi, the first Capitol of the Islamic State

Among the first things the Prophet did in Medina was to establish the mosque, which served as the first seat of government of the new state, along with its consultative assembly, the court of justice, the community center, and the residences of the Holy Prophet and his family.

The courtyard of Banu Najjar, next to which the Holy Prophet was staying, was an empty lot with a few palm trees. As the Prophet was staying next door in Abu Ayyub Ansari's home, people used to gather here in the courtyard to meet the Holy Prophet, to listen to his sermons, and to receive his guidance on various matters. Ammar bin Yasser suggested establishing a mosque here to serve as the community center. The Prophet liked the idea, but the land belonged to the two orphans of the Banu Najjar clan, Sohl and Sohail. Once they heard of Ammar's suggestion, they immediately came forward, offering the land as a gift to their esteemed resident of Medina. The Holy Prophet refused to accept it as a gift and instead asked them if they

would like to sell the land. They asked some meager amount, but the Prophet still refused. Finally, the land was purchased in exchange for ten grams of gold, satisfying them with more than they could ever get for it. Construction started soon after.

This was such a nice opportunity for community building. The Holy Prophet assigned tasks to every Muslim around, all Muhajirun and Ansaar took part in the building of the mosque. Ammar being among the most excited was often picked on by certain rich Muhajirun for his enthusiasm for building the mosque. Once upon seeing this, the Holy Prophet affectionately dusted up his clothes and prophesized that Ammar would remain the devout Muslim throughout his life, eventually becoming a martyr at the hands of a rebel group from his nation. About forty years later, he was killed by the soldiers of Muawiyah b. Abu Sufyan, who had waged a prolonged rebellion against Ali.⁴⁴

The community-focused architecture of the mosque

The Prophet's Mosque was a simple building with no domes or minarets. The humble walls were made of clay bricks; the timber from the palm trees supported the main roof, which was constructed with dried up leaves of palm trees stitched together. Roof used to leak during the rains, and the walls needed constant upkeep. Instead of tall walls and high ceilings, the vertical expansion of the mosque signified reaching to God as a community. The Prophet had taught that although Muslims could perform prayers anywhere, it was preferable and more rewarding to pray in the congregation. A courtyard was kept on the front side of the main hall to accommodate larger crowds during Fridays and other festive prayers. This basic architectural theme of a mosque became a norm throughout the Islamic lands as the message of Islam spread far and wide soon after.

On one side of the courtyard, small apartments were built for the Prophet and his family, with doors opening into the courtyard. On the other side, around seventy rooms were built for the new converts who didn't have a place to reside anywhere else. This dormitory used to be covered with the palm leaves and was called the 'Suffa', and the residents were called the As-hab as-Suffa, the 'people of the platform'. Their number at one time reached four hundred as the community grew due to rapid conversions. In the next few months, many prominent Muhajirun also built their houses adjacent to the remaining walls, opening their doors into the courtyard of the mosque.

INSTITUTING AHLULBAYT

In order to spread his Kingdom of God throughout the globe, it was imperative to establish an institution which would preserve his Message in its true form and carry his Mission in its original spirit, in all the eras going forward, even when he would not be there to carry it on physically. God ordered the Holy Prophet to formally institutionalize his Household the 'Ahlulbayt' for them to carry the torch he would leave behind.

The closing of the doors into the Masjid al-Nabi

One day as people were sitting in Masjid al-Nabi, the order came to close the doors of all houses opening into the courtyard of the mosque except the doors of the apartments of the Prophet and Ali. Some people objected to this order on which the Holy Prophet replied: "I am ordered by God to close all of your doors except for Ali b. Abi Talib's. I heard what you said, by God, I did not order to close or open any door of the mosque on my own. I was assigned to give such an order, and I fulfilled the assignment."⁴⁵ The event was known as the incident of the 'Closing of the Doors', or the Sadd al-Abwab.

Consequently, all of the doors except the doors of Muhammad and Ali were removed, and bricks were laid in their place, closing any opening facing the courtyard of the Mosque. Some Muhajirun asked to keep a window or a slit open so they could hear the call of the prayers, but God's commandment was clear, so their wish was not granted. The Holy Prophet could not be any more elaborate in his indication of what was to come. In front of the whole community, the Prophet told Ali that, "It is not lawful for anyone to be in the Mosque while under the

obligation of performing a thorough ablution, 'ghusl' except for you and me."⁴⁶

By this time, the Holy Prophet had only one wife, Sawda living with him, but God had not wished more children for him other than his honorable daughter Fatima who had reached the age of marriage.

The marriage of Ali and Fatima

Along with the closing of the doors into the Mosque, the Merciful God had ordered certain other protocols in preparation for the marriage of Fatima, similar to which the Holy Prophet had to observe in preparation for her holy birth. Ali and Fatima had their religious marriage contract, the 'nikah' performed in the month of Ramadan 2 AH. The Holy Prophet himself administered the ceremony of nikah, which the angel Gabriel attended, representing the realms of unseen. A few months later, in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, Fatima moved to the apartment of Ali. The marriage ceremony of the daughter of Muhammad became the hallmark event to be emulated throughout the codes of Islamic family law for all times to come. It became the sole source of guidance for Muslims for marriage, dowry, and other family-related issues.

The wedding feast was of dates and olives. Ali had sold his shield to procure the marriage gift, the obligatory 'Mehr'. The jewelry of the bride was only two silver armlets. The gift from the father was two shirts, one sheepskin throw, and one leather pillow stuffed with palm leaves, one grinding mill, one drinking cup, two large jars, and one pitcher. The Mehr of Fatima became the article of emulation for all new couples throughout the future generations of Muslims.

His Mission's continuity through his Household

Through this marriage, the Holy Prophet was blessed with his grandsons Hassan, born in 3 AH, and Husain, born in 4 AH, both of whom carried the Mission of the Prophet after his demise. In their time, they became the sole champions of the Prophet's revolution long after he was gone. By bringing Ali and Fatima together, the Holy Prophet had immunized his Mission from his sudden assassination at the hand of his enemies or of his eventual passing away. Through Ali and Fatima, and their children, he had secured the custodianship of the final Message of God and had made certain that the later generations would receive his Message, the Qur'an without any alterations or induced fabrications. Muhammad was warned through the divine revelations about the false inductions the previous scriptures had to endure, due to the lack of their designated custodians after the demise of their benefactor Messengers. Due to these divine warnings, the Holy Prophet had made it his habit of publicizing the pivotal status of his Ahlulbayt whenever he found an opportunity.

On many occasions, he was heard equating the divine revelation of the Qur'an with his Ahlulbayt, holding his followers accountable for the treatment of the two. During the weekly Friday congregations, during his one Hajj that he had performed in the last years of his life, many times on his way back from various wars, once after his last congregation prayer in Medina, even at his deathbed; the Holy Prophet kept reminding his followers of the two weighty things he was leaving behind, the Qur'an and his Ahlulbayt. His words before his demise were, "Looks like I have been called, and I answered, indeed I have left the two weighty things among you, one of them is greater than the other, the book of Allah and my Ahlulbayt. So look after how you will behave with them after me; indeed, they will

never separate from each other until they enter in my presence by the pool.”⁴⁷

God granting superiority to the Ahlulbayt

One day the Prophet was sitting in the courtyard of the mosque teaching some verses of revelation to his followers. When the Holy Prophet arrived at certain verses of the Sura An-Nur, the Chapter called ‘the Light’, one of the devotees asked the Holy Prophet of the ‘Superior Houses’ the God Almighty was referring to. The Prophet answered that such were the houses of the messengers and the prophets of Almighty. On which Abu Bakr stood up, pointed at the house of Ali and Fatima, and asked, “Is this house included in it too?” The Prophet replied smilingly, “Yes, this one is among the most superior among them all.” The divine verses that the Holy Prophet was teaching stated in no clear terms of the superiority ordained to those ‘Houses’ by God Himself.⁴⁸

God keeping the Ahlulbayt free from all defects

One day Fatima was busy in her house chores as she heard a knock at her door. She recognized it as the knock of her father, the Prophet of God. She immediately opened the door. Muhammad disheveled and a bit pale hurriedly entered her home. After answering the salutations that Fatima was so accustomed to accepting from her holy father, she settled him indoors covering him with a Yemeni cloak or the Yemeni ‘Kisa’. It used to be the custom of Muhammad that anytime he would leave his Mosque, he would stop by the door of Fatima’s apartment and would loudly call out peace and blessings on his Ahlulbayt.

But today was different. As Fatima was tending to Muhammad, her son Hassan entered the house and after exchanging the

salutations, exclaimed that he smelled the sweet fragrance of his grandfather nearby. She told him about the Prophet visiting them; Hassan excitedly reached the cloak offering his blessings to his grandfather Muhammad. Muhammad lovingly grabbed him in the 'Kisa' hiding little Hassan in his arms. Husain who was not far behind, joined them as well. A little while later, Ali arrived in the house and repeated the same question that Hassan and Husain had asked earlier. With Muhammad's permission, Ali joined them in the cloak too. Fatima, upon seeing this beautiful reunion, also asked to join them in the cloak. Muhammad, now surrounded by all four of his loved ones, raised his hands towards the heavens and supplicated God to "keep Ahlulbayt away from all defects."⁴⁹ God instantly sent angel Gabriel with the revelation attesting to Muhammad's prayers in his own words, immortalizing it forever in the holy verses of the Qur'an.⁵⁰

Upon seeing this divine discourse, Umm Salama, the most trusted wife of Muhammad in Medina, who was present at this auspicious occasion, inquired if she was allowed to join in as well. Muhammad stopped her from entering the cloak but assured her that she was among those who were on the right path from among his wives. Umm Salama recognizing the pivotal status of Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Husain in the continuation of Muhammad's Mission, turned out to be the most fervent campaigner of the institution of Ahlulbayt throughout her life. Years later, when the Banu Umayya brutally killed Husain in Karbala, Umm Salama was the one who gathered people in the city of Medina in support of Muhammad's Ahlulbayt reminding them of the wish of the Prophet to adhere to his Ahlulbayt and Qur'an. This event was recounted so many times that it got a title of its own of the

‘Hadith al-Kisa’ and the Ahlulbayt who had gathered with the Prophet under the cloak were called the ‘As-hab al-Kisa’.⁵¹

Ahlulbayt as the proof of his Mission

In the 9 AH, a delegation of the Christians of the Najran area of Yemen came to meet Muhammad. They had come to ascertain the truth of his Message. They met the Prophet in his mosque and saw him sitting humbly with his people on the floor, eating what others were eating, and wearing what others were wearing. They dialogued with Muhammad presenting their religion to him, arguing about the Trinity and their belief of Jesus as a son of God. The Prophet quoted them from the Bible the passages in which Jesus called himself a Prophet and a creation of God, and not His son. They argued that since Jesus didn’t have a father and both they and Muhammad believed that he had a pure birth, he must be considered the son of God.

They remained adamant about their argument until a revelation came from God, stating, “Indeed, the example of Jesus to Allah is the same as Adam. He created him from dust, then He said to him, ‘Be’, and he became.”⁵² There could not be a simpler explanation than this since Adam didn’t have a father or the mother, yet he was not considered the son of God by the Christians. The next day they came again and started arguing with the same arguments that they had presented before until the impasse reached to the extent that another revelation came from God imploring the curse of God on the liars among them. God had ordered, “Then whoever argues with you about it after the knowledge has come to you, - then say, Come let us call our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then supplicate fervently and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars.”⁵³

By now, this had become the most talked about topic in the town. Everybody was eager to see the end of this duel. The Christian delegation agreed to the 'invocation of the curse' and promised to meet the next day. The following morning while they and the whole city of Medina were assembled in a vast area outside the city, Muhammad came with 'Hassan and Husain as his sons, Fatima his daughter as his women, and himself and Ali as his selves' showing the Muslims and non-Muslims alike who his Ahlulbayt were. He hadn't brought along any of his wives or the other followers.

Overawed at the sight of his Ahlulbayt, the bishop who was also the leader of the group prohibited his followers from taking part in the event. On his insistence, they backed off, some chose to accept Islam as their new faith, others accepted to pay the yearly tribute to the state of Medina, but they all returned learning the pivotal station of the Prophet's Ahlulbayt in the success of his Mission.⁵⁴

God obligating devotion to the Ahlulbayt

Once after a major event, some men of Ansaar were found boasting of their assistance to the Holy Prophet in front of a group of Muhajirun and Muhajirun vehemently supporting their claim to the closeness of the Prophet. As the debate heated up, Muhammad stepped in and asked the Ansaar, "Were you not downtrodden and fractured, but because of me you gained your respect and were you not misled and astray, but due to me you were guided?" On which the Ansaar replied in unison that all that the Prophet had said was true regarding them. Now the Prophet noticed some Muhajirun scornfully looking down on Ansaar, he now turned towards them telling that next time they ought to reply in words like, "When you Meccans pushed him out we Medinites gave him refuge, when you refuted him we

testified his claim, when you made him downtrodden we uplifted him.” Then Muhammad kept going, once recounting the favors of Ansaar on him, then mentioning the favors of Muhajirun, until they all in humbleness and shame dropped to their knees, proclaiming that their favors were nothing in comparison to the guidance they had received from the Holy Prophet. In this charged atmosphere, they announced that from now on, “whatever wealth they had was a wager for Allah and his Prophet in return for the favor of Islam” on them.

Hearing this, God instantly revealed to the Prophet to tell them in no clear terms, “Say, I do not ask of you any reward for it but the devotion towards my near relatives.”⁵⁵ One of the Muhajirun immediately asked the Holy Prophet of who were those ‘near relatives’ that God was ordering the rest of them to be devoted to? The Prophet said: “They are Ali, Fatima, Hassan, and Husain.” Then Muhammad kept informing them of the high status of his Ahlulbayt, saying that, “Whoever dies in their love passes away like a martyr, whoever dies in their friendship remains forgiven, whoever dies in their devotion is given glad tidings of the heaven, whoever dies in their endearment rests in the perfection of his faith but whoever dies in their animosity dies like a pagan, whoever perishes in their hatred wouldn’t even be able to smell the heavens, and whoever expires in their hostility would be forever removed from the mercy of God.”⁵⁶

While the Holy Prophet was recounting the merits of his Ahlulbayt, some Muslims standing in the crowd thought Muhammad was going overboard in love of them and was asking them to do all this on his own accord without God ordering him to do so. Right away, divine retribution came chastising these doubters saying, “Or do they say regarding you, ‘he has invented a lie about Allah’, but if Allah willed, he could

have put a seal over your heart. And Allah eliminates falsehood and establishes the truth by His words. Indeed He is knowledgeable about that which is in the hearts.”⁵⁷ Muhammad promptly relayed God’s words to the people around him without singling out the weak of faith among them. Those who had doubts in their hearts, sheepishly came forward apologizing for their suspicions now that God had revealed their innermost thoughts. God accepted their apology revealing, “And it is He, who accepts repentance from his servants and pardons misdeeds”, reminding them again by saying, “He knows what you do.”⁵⁸

INTRODUCING EVERLASTING TRADITIONS

Establishing the Islamic Calendar

The year of establishment of the first Islamic government in Medina was such a monumental event that the Islamic calendar was started from the year of Prophet's migration. The first year of Hijra, the 1 AH, was the Prophet's first year in Medina.⁵⁹ The month of Muharram was declared as the first month of the Islamic Calendar in light of the divine commandment counting the months as twelve.⁶⁰ Although the popular use of this calendar started sometime later, the foundations were laid by the Prophet himself.

1st AH coincided with 622 CE.

Initiating the Call to Prayers, the Adhan

Soon after the Prophet's Mosque was completed, the angel Gabriel delivered the message to the Holy Prophet to start announcing the daily congregation prayers. Bilal, the African, was appointed as the official caller of the prayers. The call was coined as the famous Muslim Adhan. It also became the call for celebrations to invite people during Muslim holidays and also a source of assurance during the times of distress such as natural calamities and wars. The resonance of Adhan emanating from various mosques became the signature note overpowering the audible landscape of Muslim cities throughout the globe.

Reverting towards Ka'ba for the Daily Prayers

Initially, Muslims used to pray facing Jerusalem, but soon, in the 2nd AH, the commandment came to start facing the first House of God on earth. One day the Holy Prophet was engaged in the noon prayers in a congregation behind him when he was commanded by God to direct his followers to turn their faces

towards Ka'ba.⁶¹ From then on, the Muslims bowed and prostrated only facing Ka'ba, reaffirming it as the spiritual and physical capital of Islam.

Mandatory Fasts and the culture of Ramadan

In the 2 AH, in the 9th month of the Islamic calendar Ramadan, the compulsory observance of the month-long fasts became obligatory. These fasts turned out to be a bit of a struggle for the new adherents who inherently were opposed to any authority in the lawless society they used to live in, let alone being a monitor on their own selves.

The month-long fasting not only made unlawful what was already lawful during certain part of the day, it also brought the nascent community together every night to share their meals with each other, to the group reading and pondering of the verses of Qur'an, and to the mandatory donation to the poor and needy at the month's end, without which the fasting was rendered null and void. Masjid al-Nabi obviously was the congregation point for all such activities. These three traditions that the Holy Prophet started in the second year after migration remained the signature aspects of the Islamic month of Ramadan throughout the future generations of Muslims in all Islamic lands.

The Prohibition that stayed

Islam was rapidly infusing fundamental changes in the values of Arabia. Every custom was being altered to conform to the ways of Islam. Each one of these transformations was a miracle in itself since it was not an easy job to change the old habits of the people. Arabs were known to be among the most conservative lot, and the ways of their forefathers amounted to religion for them in their collective psyche. In this background, the Holy

Prophet managed to accomplish something unheard of in the history of humankind and was to remain such until the comprehensive establishment of his Mission in its entirety in the end-times.

In 8 AH, the absolute prohibition of alcohol consumption was ordered by God. Earlier, the commandments were received to discourage the use of alcohol, and many sincere followers had quit the old habits, but still, some were finding it hard to discard their addictions. Until one day, a well known Muhajir who was known for his uncontrollable anger got himself so intoxicated that he got involved in a brawl with Abd Al-Rahman bin Awf to the extent that he fractured Abd Al-Rahman's skull. This made the Holy Prophet extremely upset. He had come to elevate the politesse of his people; these acts of indecency by someone who was among the early converts had no place in the Puritan society he was working hard to establish.

As the alcoholic beverages were made unlawful, the other related abominations of the past and future were also made illegal. The gambling and the artifacts that could be taken as idols were also made absolutely unlawful.⁶² The divinely guided wisdom of the Holy Prophet had made the whole production and consumption cycle of alcoholic beverages illegal. He told his people, "God has cursed the intoxicants, the one who drinks it, the one who pours it for other, the one who sells it, the one who buys it, the one who makes it, the one who it is made for, the one who carries it, the one who it is carried to and the one who consumes the money from its sale."⁶³ The next day, the streets of Medina were reeking with the stench of alcohol beverages flushed in the gutters and on the outskirts.

HERALDING THE POLITICS OF PEACE

Medina of 623 CE was a divided city, dominated by three different but powerful political factions. The two overpowering ones were the tribes of Aws and Khazraj, who had been at war with each other for over a century. There were also the three smaller Jewish tribes who used to ally themselves with one faction or the other during this century-long war. Being in a dominant position themselves in a not too distant past, they used to vie for their lost glory.

Since Khazraj tribesmen were traditionally in higher numbers in the city of Medina, the tribesmen of Khazraj were promoting a rich man of great influence Abd Allah bin Obay Salol as the future king of Medina, obviously at the chagrin of Aws and their allied Jewish tribes.

As Islam came to Medina, tribesmen of Aws who were in the minority in Medina converted in greater numbers than the Khazraj. This fact, along with the new converts from Khazraj and some from the Jewish tribes, tilted the balance of power in favor of Aws. Such was the complexity of the political landscape of Medina when the Holy Prophet had made it his new home.

Constitution of Medina

Since Muhammad had his followers belonging from among the tribes of Aws, the Khazraj, and from among the tribes of Jews, he was soon unanimously agreed upon as the sole mediating authority in Medina. Nobody else could have taken that mantle anyway, since only he had the clout and influence on account of his followers coming from all subgroups residing in the city of Medina.

Leveraging his ultra-tribal influence among majority Medinites, the Holy Prophet immediately put in motion the peace treaty along multi-religious, multi-ethnicity, and multi-tribal lines. Without giving preference to Muslims, Jews, or Pagans, the treaty called for abiding by common core principles.

One of the clauses required Medina to be considered the sacred place, the 'Harem' where no blood could be spilled for any reason. Internal peace and the defense from external aggression were deemed the collective responsibility of all citizens of Medina. Conflicts required collective consultation, without discriminating Muslims with non-Muslims, with Muhammad being the chief judge. Its articles called for the freedom of religious practices, enacted the laws of inheritance in accordance with the religious affiliation of the deceased, and standardized the retribution that is, the blood money and the ransom payments for various acts of violence, a feat not trivial for a trigger-happy society of unresolved murders.

The Jewish population of Medina, in particular, asked to be judged by their canonical laws of Torah, the mitzvot, or the Deuteronomy Codes, whenever a judgment needed regarding Jewish constituents. Since they were the people of the book as was described in Qur'an, the request was granted and became a trailblazer injunction throughout the future Muslim lands wherever Jewish or Christians constituents were part of the citizenry.

The treaty was called the charter or the 'Constitution of Medina'⁶⁴; or the Mithaq al-Medina, in which all clans and tribes of Medina became the equal status signatory. Around the time this Constitution was put in place, Muhammad was the most powerful man of Medina and Muslims, the most powerful

entity. Arabs had, in their recent memory, never experienced a charter of equal rights put in place from someone in the position of power and dominance. This constitution in itself was no less than a revolution in a culture where fair dealing was not even an afterthought for those who happened to wield any power over others.

The Constitution immediately seized all manifestation of hostilities between the Aws and the Khazraj tribes. Medina was suddenly at peace. The only precedent this sort of arrangement had in Arabia was something that Muhammad himself had helped put together many years ago in his native city of Mecca, which was called the Hilf al-Fuzool.

Code of Brotherhood between Muslims

Soon after the Holy Prophet secured the pledge of all citizens of Medina to be the equal stakeholder in its peace, he moved on to an even more important feat. Tribal affiliations were no less than another deity for the pagan Arabs. One could commit all kinds of crimes against others yet could conveniently hide behind the protection of the collective power of their tribesmen. The more powerful tribe one belonged to, the more leverage one had to be oppressive. Muhammad had to break this idol from the conscience of his followers to instill in them the unity of monotheism in its true form.

One day, the Holy Prophet gathered all of his followers in the newly built mosque. A new commandment had arrived from God. A compulsory ordinance of brotherhood was established between them, stating, “Indeed, those who believed and emigrated and struggled with their wealth and lives in the way of Allah, and those who sheltered them and helped them, and they are the ones, who are the allies of one another.”⁶⁵ The

Holy Prophet started calling one Muhajir and one Ansaar and started establishing individual brotherhood between them, making them dearer to one another than their blood relatives, above and beyond their past tribal associations. With one declaration, he had crushed the idol of tribal superiority over one another once and for all.

Ansaar of Medina obeyed this new order of brotherhood in its true form. They literally divided their homes, properties, livestock, orchards, even their business holdings into two and happily gifted a half to their assigned brother in faith from Muhajirun. Just as the last time, the Holy Prophet kept his own brotherhood reserved for Ali, signifying his and Ali's status as universal to all Muslims, above the time-bound designations of Muhajirun and Ansaar, although technically they both were from the group of Muhajirun in Medina.

ANNOUNCING THE SACRED DEFENSE

It was the second year after his Hijra. The Holy Prophet was busy establishing the fundamental pillars of an ideal Islamic society in Medina. The sketches of a multi-ethnic Islamic state were fast emerging from the enactment of the two treaties the Holy Prophet had put in motion so far; one was the 'Charter of Medina' which had united all citizens of Medina regardless of their religious beliefs, and the other was the 'Code of Brotherhood' that had united his own flock. Although they were all Muslims, they were still coming from hugely diverse backgrounds, and a formal proclamation to make them brothers was necessary to tear down the barriers of tribal or other affiliations. Among them were Meccans, local Medinites, a few Africans, a few Yemenis; both Arabs and non-Arabs combined, so the human-made divisions were not singular by any means.

After the Prophet's arrival, for the first time in decades, the city of Medina was experiencing order and the rule of law. With the Holy Prophet at the helm, Muslims as a unified entity were the main guarantor of peace in the city. Muhammad had united them in one universal religious brotherhood, which was above and beyond any petty differences the people around them used to hold dear. With every other faction divided many times into clans and classes, Muslims were the only entity that was part of all other groups yet was only beholden to Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

But the things were not all rosy. This peace was also earning the Holy Prophet many internal enemies in Medina. Certain affluent tribes were extremely irritated at the indiscriminate application of the law by the Holy Prophet, something they were not used

to for the past many centuries. Most active hostilities against the Constitution of Medina were coming from those who, for the past hundreds of years, were earning the biggest profits by keeping the civil wars alive through their deadly trade.

His external enemies in Mecca were not sitting idle either. They were seeing Muhammad's growing power with disgust and trepidations. They were fearful of the day his revolution would shatter their empire of false gods and unjust tribal codes they had been so successfully executing on account of Ka'ba located in their city. They had seen to their horror how centuries of suppressed slaves were defying their masters once they were exposed to Muhammad's Message.

Both his internal and external enemies were unanimous on one thing. Killing Muhammad would eventually achieve the annihilation of his Mission for good. Experiencing Muhammad's determination first hand, they knew that they couldn't settle for anything less!

Jihad, the minor struggle

Since no permission to take up arms had yet come from God, the Holy Prophet was keeping himself aware of the movements of his enemies but was not taking any measures to wage any active defense. But with the intent to kill ambitions of his enemies, soon, a definitive revelation came to the Holy Prophet. This was the absolute first commandment that came to the Prophet regarding Jihad.

The revelation exact words were, "Permission is given to those who are being killed because they were oppressed and Allah indeed is capable of assisting them. They are those who have been evicted from their homes without any justification – only because they say, Our Lord is Allah. And were it not that Allah

repels some people through the others, there would have been monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques demolished, in which the name of Allah is much mentioned.”⁶⁶

After receiving these verses, the Holy Prophet explained the rules of war to Muslims. His instructions were clear, and he used to remind these to his followers before any active engagements frequently. Violence against children, women, the elderly, or the sick was absolutely prohibited. No mutilation or trampling of the bodies was allowed which was a common practice of the Arabs in their wars. No one was allowed to punish anybody with fire, as it was only for God to punish the evildoers with it. No uprooting, burning, or cutting of the fruit trees was allowed. Not allowed also was the killing of the monks or the clergy sitting in their places of worship. No destruction of homes, towns, cultivated fields or orchards was permitted. They were not to wish for an encounter with the enemy and were to practice patience when the violent encounter did happen.⁶⁷

It was important to keep this distinction in mind; there was no offensive war ever allowed or institutionalized by the Holy Prophet. It was an abomination that came later by those who wanted to further their empires in the name of his Mission. It was also important to remember that even though the defensive wars were allowed, they were still called the Jihad al-Asghar, the ‘minor struggle’; the Jihad al-Akbar or the ‘major struggle’ was still reserved for struggling against one’s desires that force one to do undesirable things.

Section IX: CASCADING WARS, SIMMERING REBELLIONS

In roughly ten years of his life in Medina, the Holy Prophet was forced to fight eighty wars, on average defending eight aggressions a year. Almost all of these wars were fought around the city of Medina, highlighting the fact that he never was the first to wage aggression. Those few that he fought far away from Medina were also due to the direct result of violent provocations initiated by his enemies on the city-state of Medina. Nonetheless, these cascading wars showed the intense determination of his internal and external enemies in destroying his Message, the Message that he had to protect at all costs. The costs that he did pay dearly!

THE BATTLE OF BADR

Most trade expeditions of Arabia used to accompany a cavalry of mounted warriors to protect their wealth against the desert Arab gangs. Since Medina was not a heavily walled city and was located in the path of the trade routes between Mecca and Syria, any such trade expedition headed by a hostile Meccan chief could make a quick ambush on Medina in the darkness of the night conveniently achieving their sinister designs. The Holy Prophet was aware of this and used to send his scouts on the lookout for any such expedition carrying armed guards more than the norm.

Circumstances leading to the battle

In the Spring of 2 AH, a trade expedition headed by Abu Sufyan was returning from Syria, protected by forty heavily armed warriors. As they made their approach near the distant outskirts of Medina, they abruptly changed their normal course and turned away from the coastal highway not frequented by the trade caravans, raising suspicions that some sinister scheme was afoot.

Muhammad was informed of it through his scouts. On learning this, he assembled a ragtag battle group of 313 men to defend Medina. What prompted the Prophet to take extra precautionary measures was because recently, there was a minor skirmish between his scouts and another trade caravan belonging to Meccans. In that encounter, the caravan guards had attacked his scouts, and in defense, one of the caravan guards was killed. Although not of his scouts' fault, the Prophet had promptly paid the blood money to the Meccans to keep peace on his borders. But the Holy Prophet was not expecting

this to end here since he knew Abu Sufyan was finding reasons to attack Medina.

Abu Sufyan, meanwhile, expecting that his change, of course, would prompt Muhammad to take precautionary measures, sent out a mayday call to Mecca. Meccans, as if they were readying for such a confrontation for months, responded in hours with a thousand strong weapon laced cavalry. Their forces hurriedly marched towards Medina under the leadership of Muhammad's sworn enemies, namely Abu Jahl, Waleed bin Utbah, and Umayya bin Khalf.

Dissension in the ranks

Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, and Abu Lahab zealous in their animosity and likely concocted this scenario in advance had not taken into account the consent of other tribes of Mecca. When the Meccan army departed, there were little more than a thousand men with them, but soon the clan of Banu Zohra dropped out. These were the same Banu Zohra who decades ago, had supported Muhammad in formulating the 'League of Righteous' in Mecca. Seeing this, Banu Adi clan, who hadn't had much invested in the trade expedition of Abu Sufyan, also dropped out.

Interestingly many members of the Banu Hashim clan tagged along with the army, only for many members to later giving themselves up as prisoners of war to Muslims. The Meccan army, now about nine hundred strong, made a quick march towards Medina.

Muhammad's care for the citizens of Medina

Due to the unanimously agreed upon Charter of Medina, Muhammad had an option to stay in Medina and fight hunkered down along with his non-Muslim fellow citizens, turning

invaders' majority into the minority. But Muhammad knew who his enemies were really after; hence, he didn't want to pain the neutral Medinites to protect his own life. Besides this, only a few months ago, he had declared Medina a Harem, the sacred sanctuary; he couldn't allow anyone to spill blood there.

With these considerations in mind, the Holy Prophet ordered his men to march out of the city of Medina towards the wells of Badr. Muslims were outnumbered by three to one, extremely unequipped; there were two horses and seventy camels for the army of 313. Ali was carrying the banner of the Prophet marshaling ahead of the army.

The Battle ensues

On the 17th of Ramadan, the two armies met at Badr. Meccans were overjoyed by seeing their majority compared to the equipment strapped Muslim battalion they were confronting. To further demoralize Muslims, Abu Sufyan, who had been heading to Mecca with the trade caravan so far, sent the caravan forward and joined the army in a huge show of pomp with his armed guards.

The battle started with three knights of Meccans coming forward, inviting single combat. They were Abu Sufyan's father in law Utbah, Utbah's son Waleed and brother Sheiba. Three Ansaar from Medina responded but were slurred back by Meccans, not considering them their equals. They instead asked for the Meccans. As usual, the family members of the Prophet responded first. From Muhammad's side Ali, their uncle Hamza and their cousin Obeida came forward. Ali faced Waleed, who he killed after a brief combat, Hamza faced Sheiba who was killed promptly, but Obeida got mortally injured while fighting Utbah. Ali came to rescue Obeida, liquidating Utbah with one

blow. Obeida later expired in Medina four days after the war ended.

On seeing his in-laws annihilated at the hands of the knights of Banu Hashim, Abu Sufyan ordered the archers to attack the Muslim battalion. Muslims responded in kind; a few Muslims and unknown numbers of Qureish combatants were killed. Now Abu Sufyan ordered the Meccan army to charge, horse-mounted troopers armed with swords and spears rushed towards the small company of Muslims overwhelming them from front and sides. The Holy Prophet, who was sitting under a canopy overseeing the battleground, came out and raised his hands for prayers. The Muslims charged back, this time with special assistance from God. The verse revealed recalling this event, "Remember when you asked the help of your Lord, and He answered you; indeed, I shall reinforce you with a thousand from the angels, following one another."⁶⁸

Qureish army was soon routed, running away from the battlefield leaving back seventy slain Meccans, many among them were their nobles and knights, some of them rabid enemies of the Holy Prophet and his Mission. Ali had singlehandedly killed more than half of them, the other half being eliminated by the remaining Muslims. The most notable Meccans casualties were Abu Jahl, Utbah, Sheiba, Waleed, and Umayya. Forty-five Meccans were made prisoners; some among them from Banu Hashim, who didn't even put a serious fight, notable among them were Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet, and Aqeel, the brother of Ali. The Qureish ran away in such distress that they left behind their transport animals, their encampment, their armors and the provisions that they had brought along. From the Muslims' side, there were fourteen

casualties; six were from the Muhajirun and eight were from the Ansaar.

Reverberations of the victory of Badr

Throughout Arabia, Muslims were now a force to be reckoned with. They had come back victorious from a war that was forced upon them by a much powerful enemy and which they had fought with almost no material provisions.

In Medina, many of the prisoners of war accepted Islam in a few days soon after they were captured. Others, who chose not to, were freed on the condition to teach illiterate Muslims. Local opposition muted down considerably; most notable among them was Abd Allah b. Obay Salol, the aspirant king of Medina, who had never accepted Muhammad's authority wholeheartedly. At least temporarily, he had ceased his overt antagonism.

In Mecca, the Battle of Badr had removed Muhammad's Mission, two of its most diehard enemies. One was Abu Jahl, who was killed at the hands of the two Ansaar youth. The other was Abu Lahab, who died with the grief of humiliation meted out to them at Badr. Abu Sufyan, the chief of Banu Umayya, survived the battle of Badr and was subsequently crowned with the leadership of Meccans enmity towards Muhammad's Mission. His wife, Hind bint Utbah was right behind in his footsteps.

In the future, Abu Sufyan's descendants carried this enmity with blood craved obsession until they became irrelevant in the pages of history. The victory of Badr remained an often remembered triumph for Muhammad's Ahlulbayt and a permanent scar on the ego of their rivals in Banu Umayya. Their humiliation in Badr, the descendants of Abu Sufyan viciously

avenged from the Ahlulbayt of Muhammad almost half a century later in Karbala and Damascus, by killing Muhammad's progeny and imprisoning his granddaughters.⁶⁹ The memory of martyrs of Badr and their slain pagan counterparts were invoked throughout the civil wars waged by the Umayyads against the Prophet's Mission, even hundreds of years after Muhammad's demise.

DEFIANCE AT THE COURT OF LAW

Soon after the victory of Badr, came the intense competition from some of the Jewish tribes of Medina. Foremost among them were the tribes of Banu Qaynuqa and Banu Nadir. These and other Jewish tribes were a minority in Medina but had been yielding much greater influence due to their trade in gold and arms, their huge landholdings, and their lending and usury businesses. In pre-Islamic Medina, their wealth had made their communities more equal than the others. The Charter of Medina, while granting equal rights to all religious denominations, called for the rule of law and upholding the same principals by and for all groups of Medina.

Muhammad's adherence to the Rule of Law

With their age-old clout in Medina threatened, Jewish tribesmen were becoming increasingly hostile to the Medinite Muslims. Random brawls, bullying, catcalling became the common offenses by these tribesmen. About a month after the Badr victory, a rather indecent offense was reported to the Holy Prophet. A Jewish jeweler was caught assaulting a Muslim woman in his shop. A Muslim man witnessing the assault attacked the jeweler and in the heat of the brawl, killed him. The Jews from the neighboring shops gathered around and punched the Muslim man to death. The case went to the higher authority of the Prophet by the laws of the Charter of Medina. The Prophet summoned all parties involved.

Banu Qaynuqa, intoxicated with their perceived exceptional status in the city, refused to produce their thugs and instead holed up in their quarters, refusing any compromise. This was a grave threat to the peace in Medina; first, the criminal assault,

then the unresolved murders, and now protecting the offenders, everything the Charter of Medina stood for was being challenged. These were exactly the sort of incidents that had prompted the age-old feuds in Arabia. The Holy Prophet could not allow this to repeat in the new Medina.

On their repeated refusal to comply with the law, the Prophet ordered to lay the siege to Banu Qaynuqa neighborhood, which was eventually surrendered in little less than a day.⁷⁰

Banu Qaynuqa bribing to revoke the Laws of Torah

Since the Jewish elders had originally requested to be dealt with by the laws of Torah during the agreement of the Constitution of Medina, the Prophet wanted to deal with them by the instrument they had demanded. The Torah law called for severe punishment for those found breaking the agreements and resorting to organized violence. For warring men, the punishment was the death by the sword, and for their relatives, it was the captivity and the confiscation of their properties. Sedition and insurgency of any kind were severely punished in the laws of the Torah.⁷¹

But now that they were made to surrender after their haughty rebellion, they attempted to bribe the Holy Prophet instead of receiving the punishment their own mitzvot had demanded of them. Abd Allah b. Obay Salol found this as a perfect opportunity to show his political clout and was appointed by the Jewish elders to be their attorney. On their behalf, he implored the Holy Prophet to keep them in the city in order to secure their help in case of another Meccan attack. Banu Qaynuqa had more than seven hundred warriors under their command at the time.

Banu Qaynuqa exiled

The Prophet obviously refused until Abd Allah b. Obay brought a compromise proposal from his clients. Banu Qaynuqa had offered to leave the city of Medina instead of receiving the punishment due on them by their own Torah law. The Holy Prophet, out of his compassion, accepted it and allowed them to leave the city.

Banu Qaynuqa's refusal to uphold the law had pained the Prophet immensely. His vision for the city of Medina was a sanctuary of peace in Arabia, a holy city devoid of any hatred, of any crime, of any racism, and in particular of any selective enforcement of the law. After all, it was the Prophet himself, who only a month ago had bothered to leave the city of Medina to face the mighty Meccan attack only to uphold the sanctity of this city, the sanctity which was so brashly flouted by the Banu Qaynuqa.

Punishment for spreading the sectarian hatred

As if concocted in some high council, there was another concurrent offense underway that was specifically geared towards damaging the communal peace in Medina. Ka'b bin Ashraf was a high elder of the Jewish Banu Nadir tribe and was a poet of ill repute. Soon after the Qureish rout at Badr, he traveled to Mecca, consoling Meccans on their defeat and instigating Abu Sufyan to attack Medina again, promising his tribe's support in his next invasion. Once back in his hometown, he made it a habit of gathering crowds in the marketplaces, reading poetry warning Medinites of the misfortunes going to befall them due to the presence of Muslims among them, occasionally reciting profane poetry about Muslim women and daring Muslims to respond in kind. His actions were clearly aimed at inciting inter-communal bloodshed in Medina. He was

reprimanded repeatedly but used to hide behind his tribe's clout; he was eventually charged with spreading hatred with murderous intent and was sentenced to death by the statutes of the Charter of Medina.

Meanwhile, as it was agreed previously, the whole clan of Banu Qaynuqa and a bunch of other troublemakers from the Banu Nadir clan moved out of the city, seeing no future in the orderly state of Medina.⁷² Making a temporary stay elsewhere in Hijaz, they eventually moved on and settled around the Der'a district in Syria. Some sixty years after the Hijra, when Muhammad's Ahlulbayt were taken captive by the descendants of Abu Sufyan, they paraded the women and children of Muhammad's family through the quarters of these same criminal exiles, who were now residing in Damascus, imploring them to pelt rocks, burning coal and debris at them.⁷³

THE BATTLE OF UHUD

Banu Nadir was one of the most influential Jewish tribes of Medina, and Ka'b bin Ashraf was one of their most prominent elders. In Mecca, the news of his sentence by the court of law of Medina was received with extreme shock and disbelief. Abu Sufyan had never imagined that Muhammad's Mission of human equality could gain such strength as to be able to hold accountable the most powerful people of its society. He was foreseeing gigantic changes on the horizon of Arabia and was assuming that he had the means to stop all this in its infancy, only if he could somehow extinguish the light of Muhammad.

Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, was even more incensed. It was her father, brother, and uncle who were killed in a single day, in the battle of Badr. Notwithstanding that nobody had forced them to challenge Ali and Hamza on the battlefield; she wanted her revenge anyway, and she wanted it in the worst form possible. Hind promptly employed her slave named Wahshi to kill either Hamza or Ali and in return, win his freedom along with some other unspeakable perks.

Meccans preparing for their next aggression

Abu Sufyan ordered the Qureish to allocate their one year's worth of trade profits towards the next war efforts. More and more trade expeditions were sent out to earn more profit. A few of their expeditions carrying back armaments had been intercepted by the Muslims and confiscated. They soon abandoned the Medina passage and instead found a new trade route through the desert of Najd along the Euphrates to Syria.

In the 3 AH, in the month of Ramadan, like prior year, the ostentatious Meccan army took off with great pomp. Their allies

from the coastal planes, Banu Kinana and Banu Tehama, also contributed with heavy reinforcements. This time the Meccan army was three thousand strong; seven hundred of them were armored personnel with two hundred of them, mounted soldiers. Also accompanying were a thousand camels carrying the remaining infantry and the war provisions. Abu Sufyan was the commander in chief of the army. The right flank was headed by Khalid b. Waleed and the left by Ikrama, son of already slain Abu Jahl. Also came along Hind, the wife of Abu Sufyan, along with other prominent women of Qureish singing their war songs to raise the morale of their men.

Hind trying to desecrate the grave of Prophet's mother

When the army reached the township of Abwa on their way to Medina, Hind, mother of Muawiyah, had the army halted and ordered to look for the grave of the Prophet's mother, Amena bint Wahb. Amena had died half a century earlier, returning from Medina to her hometown Mecca with her young son Muhammad. As the grave was being searched for, Hind asked for some men to be readied with shovels to excavate her remains. Soon it was known in the army that Hind was hell-bent on excavating the remains of Muhammad's mother. Some tribesmen, even though still polytheists, protested and threatened to quit the invading force. Only through a mix of persuasion and her concern of the fighting force being reduced due to her vengeful ambition did she agree to let go of her desire for the desecration of Amena's grave.

Muhammad marches out for the Sacred Defense

Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet who likely had discreetly accepted Islam during the battle of Badr but had moved back to Mecca, was continuously informing him of the Meccan army's movements. When his most recent message arrived, the

Prophet was in Qoba. He hurried back to Medina and consulted his adherents of their opinions. Many wanted to stay in Medina and defend from inside the city, but some suggested marching out like the last time. The Prophet also opted to meet the enemy outside the city.

The Holy Prophet gathered seven hundred men; his standard-bearer was as usual Ali.⁷⁴ Another three hundred from allied Jewish tribes and some Khazraj also joined under the command of Abd Allah b. Obay Salol. Muhammad refused to put his non-Muslim fellow citizens in harm's way. He only wanted to take Muslims with him on Jihad because this war was solely about defending Islam. On Muhammad's repeated refusal, Abd Allah b. Obay turned back with all of his men. He also chose not to join the Muslim army in his individual capacity. He was called the leader of hypocrites from then on because although he had converted to Islam for a while, politically, he had always been sticking with his non-Muslim comrades.

It was the month of Shawwal, 3 AH. The Muslim army marched out of Medina and camped near Mount Uhud in such a way that the Mount Uhud stood behind them, and the city of Medina in front with the mighty Meccan army camped between the two facing the Muslims. The Holy Prophet wanted to keep the Meccans guessing if Muslim reinforcements were arriving from their rear, keeping some of their infantry on guard there and hence making them useless during the real combat.

The Prophet appointing the archers on the ridge

There was a mountain pass just on the left side of the Muslim army. The Prophet assigned fifty archers on the top of the ridge to guard his army's rear. He gave loud and clear orders to the archers to never abandon their position unless ordered by him

alone. The exact words of the Prophet were, “Protect us from behind and do not leave your position. Even if you see us being killed, do not come to help us. Do not join us even if you see us collect the booty. Do not leave your position even if you see birds snatching us unless I inform you. If you do not stand there, we cannot win the battle.”⁷⁵ Then the Prophet made Allah his witness that he had conveyed these ordered to them.

The battle started with first shots from Meccans

The Meccan army made a crescent formation to envelop the Muslim army from all sides, and with Mount Uhud behind them, leaving them no escape from total annihilation. The war started with Meccan archers shooting arrows towards the Holy Prophet. They were responded by the Muslim archers strategically stationed by the Prophet on an elevated spot. Soon after, a Meccan knight Talha bin Abi Talha came forward and invited Muslims for single combat. Ali came forward and with one blow, had one of his legs chopped off. As he fell, his trousers slipped down. Ali immediately turned his face away and let him crawl out from the battleground. Violence for the sake of violence was not part of Sacred Defense, Talha was disabled and was out of combat, and that was enough for Ali. Talha eventually died of his injury. Then another knight came forward and was sent to gallows at the hands of Hamza. One after another, nine more Meccan warriors challenging similar duels were subsequently killed at the hands of Ali and Hamza. In one of the duels, Hamza faced a renowned Meccan knight named Saba bin Abd al-Uzza. As Hamza was busy fighting Saba, Hind’s slave Wahshi hiding behind a rock, speared him from the back, killing him on the spot.

On seeing this, Ali, his cousin Mus’ab bin Omair, Abu Dajana, and Sahel ferociously attacked the Meccan main flank. In

parallel, the Prophet ordered the general charge; Muslims led by Ali soon captured the heart of the Meccan camp. Meccan army on seeing their camp taken over left their women and provisions behind and fled. While Ali and his knights were busy chasing Abu Sufyan and other renowned Meccans in the battlefield, the rest of the Muslim army started looting the captured camp. The archer division, camped on the ridge and ordered by the Holy Prophet to never abandon their positions, could not bear to see others getting rich on the loot.

Muslims punished for disobeying the Prophet

Forty of the archers climbed down from the ridge, rushing to the plunder. Abd Allah bin Jobair, the commander of the archers, along with another nine faithful believers, kept calling them back. Khalid, the commander of the right flank of the Meccan army, was facing the left flank of the Prophet's battalion and was witnessing the treachery of the Muslim archers. He decided to capitalize on their folly, took a small cavalry, and mowed down the remaining archers positioned on the ridge. Abd Allah bin Jobair was the last to be cut down; in his last moments, he had run out of arrows, took out his spear until it broke in half, fought with his sword until he succumbed from the blows of Khalid's cavalry and died obeying the Prophet's orders.

Muslim army routed and deserters exposed

As soon as Khalid took over the ridge, the fate of the Meccans turned. A Meccan soldier stepped forward and lifted the fallen banner of the pagans. In between this chaos, Mus'ab b. Omair, the cousin of the Holy Prophet, fell; he used to resemble the Holy Prophet a lot and had been so far charging along with Ali in the heart of the enemy camp. Seeing his dead body, a Meccan announced that Muhammad had been killed. As soon as the

Muslim army heard the call, they threw away their weapons and ran toward the mountain. Some were seen commenting, 'had Muhammad been the real prophet; he won't have died'. Others were already talking of seeking pardon from Abu Sufyan and returning to Mecca. Annas b. Nazar saw Omar, Talha, and a few others sitting carelessly. He yelled at them, shaming them on their defeat. On which Omar shouted back, "Muhammad has been slain, and they had nothing to do with him."⁷⁶ Annas rebuked him loudly, saying, "My friend! Though Muhammad might be slain, Muhammad's Lord lives. Fight for the cause for which he fought for." After this, he drew his sword and charged back on the battlefield. He fought valiantly until he died. Abu Bakr, Abu Obeida, and Othman were among the most notable ones who had fled the battleground that day. Angel Gabriel descended with the commandment identifying the true Muslims from the runaways by saying, "From you were those who chose this present world, and from you were those who preferred the world to come hereafter."⁷⁷

Ali saving the day

Muslims had been beaten back, most of them deserting the battlefield either running away towards Medina or heading for the safety of the Mount Uhud. Ali knowing full well the real aim of the Qureish, rushed back from the center. He found Muhammad alone in the foot of Mount Uhud, calling his followers to rally around him. Ali saw many of them not even looking back at the Prophet. Nusaybah was an exception; she was among the first women converts from Medina. She had reached the battlefield with her husband and two sons. On Ali's call, the whole family surrounded Muhammad, shielding him from the enemies. She kept on defending the Prophet until both of her sons lost their lives, as she collapsed with the battle wounds.

Ali was left alone to face the onslaught of the Meccan knights. Escorting Muhammad next to a steep rock, Ali made himself an impenetrable shield around the Holy Prophet, charging with his horse left, right and front, swords in both hands, heads flying wherever he turned, his horse riddled with arrows and his own body ripped by the long spears of Meccans who now were fearful of coming too close to him. His hands blistered and bruised, covered in the blood of Muhammad's enemies; many swords broke in Ali's hand that day. In between one such moment, Muhammad handed him a heavenly sword, and an unseen caller heard calling, "There is no saber equal to Dhulfiqar and no gallant like Ali." A divine revelation was sent singing praises for Ali, "Those who responded to Allah and the Messenger after injury had struck them."⁷⁸ Ali had received sixteen wounds that day, four of the blows were so forceful that he almost fell from his horse and was aided by Gabriel to get back on. On seeing Ali's gallantry, Gabriel said to Muhammad, "This is called the camaraderie!" on which Muhammad replied, "Why won't it be? I am from him, and he is from me."⁷⁹

Abu Sufyan retreating in confusion

Watching Ali's unflinching defense of the Holy Prophet, a few men from the Muslim army started coming down from Mount Uhud. Abu Sufyan, having witnessed the steely resolve of Ali, recalled the horrific rout of his center flank in the morning and ordered a thorough retreat. Hind in this chaos had made Wahshi grab the body of Hamza, which she had ripped open in the chest, taken his liver out and chewed on it.⁸⁰ Not stopping at that, she had slashed the ears, fingers, and nose of Hamza and swaged those around her neck. She was known as the 'Hind the liver eater' from then on.

Racing back to the safety of Mecca, Abu Sufyan realized his disastrous blunder. Before today, he had never been so close to killing Muhammad. Cursing his hasty pull back, he immediately assembled his best swordsmen and sent them towards the Mount Uhud to finish off with Muhammad. God informed the Holy Prophet of Abu Sufyan's murderous intents. On learning this, Muhammad took his selected men from whatever was left of his army and rushed after Abu Sufyan. Abu Sufyan didn't expect this; he thought Muhammad's men had abandoned him and he must still be recovering from the losses of the day.

To dissuade Muslims from chasing him, he bribed Naeem b. Masood, who was traveling to Medina for the purpose of trade to spread rumors among Muslim troops that Abu Sufyan was waiting for them in an ambush to pulverize them. Ali shrugged it off and uttered the famous phrase, which God liked so much that He revealed those to Muhammad and made them eternal by including them in the holy book Qur'an, "Sufficient for us is Allah, and He is the best disposer of affairs."⁸¹ From Muslims' side, Abu Saeed Khazaie went ahead and warned Abu Sufyan that the Holy Prophet, along with Ali and others, was coming after him to punish him for his conspiracies, hearing this Abu Sufyan panicked and resumed his cowardly flight towards the safety of Mecca.

Lessons from Uhud

The battle of Uhud turned out to be a great learning opportunity for everybody involved. The victory was snatched from the Muslims for their disobedience to the Holy Prophet's commands. Those who had taken Islam as a means of earning worldly gains were standing exposed in their true intentions. The Prophet had also tested the faith of his followers and had identified those who he could rely on in similar future

encounters. He had also identified those who were well-intentioned but needed more spiritual training during the peace times. The pretenders who used to pose as the biggest supporters of the Prophet's Mission but their actions showed otherwise were also snubbed by God in one of the harshest rebukes ever found in the Qur'an about his followers.⁸²

Ali again came out as the most selfless defender of Muhammad and his Mission. While others ran to save their lives, Ali remained steadfast to his promise that he made to the Prophet in Da'wat Dhu 'l-Ashira in Mecca, some fifteen years ago. This oath of selfless protection of Muhammad's Mission he proudly carried throughout his life and transferred it in his descendants who, exactly in the footsteps of their forefather Ali, never turned their backs on the Mission of Muhammad, even at the expense of their own lives.⁸³

Establishing the tradition of grieving

The Prophet lost some of his most ardent devotees; some were from his own relatives like Hamza and Mus'ab and some from the Muhajirun and Ansaar. The only family his uncle Hamza had in Medina was Muhammad, his daughter Fatima and Ali. Muhammad was extremely saddened at seeing Hamza's empty quarters and that there was no family of his bereaving for him after he was gone. Seeing his grief on Hamza's brutal death, some women from Ansaar gathered in Hamza's house and wailed over the barbarity that was done to his body. This act of crying and wailing for someone brutalized this way in the service of God was liked so much that it was revealed to the Holy Prophet to make it a tradition among Muslims.⁸⁴

Muhammad loses his mother again

A few months after the battle of Uhud, in 4 AH, Muhammad's surrogate mother, Fatima bint Asad passed away. She was the second lady who had declared her belief in Islam soon after the declaration of faith by Khadija. Muhammad hadn't known any mother other than Fatima b. Asad. She had seven children, four sons, and three daughters, Ali being the youngest. But her special love was always reserved for Muhammad, who came in her care when he was only eight years old. Even before that, Muhammad was practically living in her care when his grandfather was his guardian for the three years of his childhood. In her lap she grew the most luminous of the personalities of Islam; most renowned among them Muhammad the Prophet of God, Ali the vicegerent of Muhammad, Jaffer the leader of Muslims in Abyssinia, Aqeel the famous father of Muslim,⁸⁵ and Umm Hani from whose house the first heavenly ascension of the Holy Prophet took place. Even God sang Fatima b. Asad's praises in Qur'an.⁸⁶ The Prophet of Islam prepared her grave with his own hands and buried her in his own shirt to honor her in this life and the next.

REBELLION OF BANU NADIR TRIBE

The futility of the Uhud war was a huge stain on Abu Sufyan's prestige. He had yet again come back defeated. On his suggestion, the Qureish had invested one full year of their trade profits in the Uhud campaign. After so much loss of blood and treasure, all he had achieved was his wife's heinous revenge on Hamza. Still, his large ego could not let him pause for a moment and ponder on the reasons for the popularity of Muhammad's message among Arabs. Either he was blinded by the love of his idols, or by the lust of his leadership over Qureish, or the legacy of the generations of rivalry with Banu Hashim, he chose not to stop and instead doubled down his war efforts to block Muhammad in his Mission. A perfect offer was waiting for him to bankroll his next aggression.

A savage murder attempt

The Banu Nadir tribesmen were furious at the Holy Prophet for the justice that was handed out to their menacing elder Ka'b bin Ashraf for his hate-mongering media campaign against Muhammad and his followers. They were conspiring to take exemplary revenge on the Holy Prophet. One day they invited the Prophet to their quarters, which were located just on the outskirts of Medina. The plan was to bring the Holy Prophet for dinner and a discussion and have him sit under a slanted roof, from the top of which they would roll a millstone on the Prophet's head to kill him instantly.

Muhammad did come as he had promised, but he left abruptly in between the meeting. God had informed him of the murder plot. He had another couple of his devotees with him who shortly took off as well. As soon as the Prophet reached back to

Medina, he summoned the Banu Nadir elders for an explanation of the attempted murder. After the due trial, the Prophet ordered the Banu Nadir expulsion from Medina within ten days.⁸⁷ Banu Nadir instead locked themselves up in their quarters in open defiance of the Constitution of Medina.

Banu Nadir asking not to apply the Jewish Law

The Prophet ordered a siege of their dwellings, which lasted for about fifteen days. Learning from Banu Qaynuqa, they also asked Muhammad to not apply the Torah law on them. The Constitution of Medina required the application of the Laws of Torah on them, but the Holy Prophet again made an exception to avoid the bloodshed. They were expelled from Medina in the 4 AH. They were allowed to carry all of their moveable assets except their armaments, emptying their homes with their silks and gold. Most of Banu Nadir left to Khyber, a Jewish stronghold near Medina, where they soon took over the leadership of the city while a few of the tribesmen migrated onwards to Syria.

Banu Nadir bankrolling the Meccan war

The Banu Nadir tribesmen, now exiled from Medina for their consecutive treasons, found the Jewish stronghold of Khyber as their new safe-house to spread anarchy. There they started making fresh alliances with the pagan Bedouin tribes of Banu Qais, Banu Asad, Banu Ghataffan, and Banu Solaim, to unseat Muhammad from Medina, once and for all. They sent emissaries to Abu Sufyan pledging to provide funds and logistics for the next invasion. They also committed to match the army that Abu Sufyan would raise to destroy Muhammad and his followers jointly. Abu Sufyan, who was looking for an opportunity like this, immediately signed up for the offer and started preparing for the next war.

THE BATTLE OF KHANDAQ

Abu Sufyan collected four thousand of his best fighters, battle-hardened by now, and took off to Medina. He had seen the effectiveness of Khalid's cavalry last year, so he increased the mounted soldiers; this time, they had three hundred horsemen with fifteen hundred camels for transportation.

In the month of Shawwal, the 5 AH, Abu Sufyan, and his allies met near Medina. Banu Nadir had brought along six thousand men equipped with their new shiny weapons supplied by the Banu Nadir's largesse. Due to the armies collected from various tribes, the Battle of Khandaq was also called the Battle of Ahzab, meaning the Battle of Allied Troops.⁸⁸ Allied army was ten thousand strong now.

Banu Qurayza denying the Constitution of Medina

Banu Qurayza, the third major Jewish tribe of Medina, was so far at peace with the remaining Medinites living by the rules of the Constitution of Medina. But seeing the ten thousand strong force approaching Medina and their cousins in Banu Nadir tribe helping them, they became sure of Muslims' doom. A Banu Nadir tribesman named Hoyay bin Akhtab met the chief of the Banu Qurayza, Ka'b bin Asad and convinced him to renege on the pact with Muslims. Bribes, religious affinity, and family ties, but most of all, the enmity for Muhammad's Mission won him over. He was tasked to attack Muslims from the rear once Muslims were busy securing the city from the invading army.

The Holy Prophet was keeping himself aware of the machinations being worked up by his Mission's enemies. Banu Khuza'a, who used to live close to Mecca, had alarmed the Holy

Prophet of Meccan movements giving him at least a week's worth of lead time on his enemies.

Digging of the Trench, Khandaq

The city of Medina was surrounded by the rocky terrain from the east and the west and was not easy to tread for a large army. The southern side had acres of trees and shrubs and was a natural barrier to a large invading force. Northwestern front, which was facing Mount Uhud, was exposed to an open invasion. Selman al-Farsi had suggested a novel method of defense that Muhammad liked very much because it allowed the least amount of casualties from both sides. Muslims during the fasting month of Ramadan dug fifteen feet wide and fifteen feet deep canal across the northwestern plains securing Medina from a large-scale attack. The gravel unearthed from the trench was lined on the inner edge of the trench, making Medina essentially a walled city, providing the defenders of Medina a barrier against the projectiles from the invaders.

The houses on the outskirts were emptied, and the people in the suburbs were called in the center of the city for safety. Whatever provisions they could gather in the past one week was what they had available to brave the expected siege. Muhammad was hoping to outlive the patience of the invaders now soon ganging up on Medina. There were only three thousand Muslims in Medina to safeguard the city against the allied forces of Arabia. Due to the treachery of the Banu Qurayza, the Holy Prophet had to carve out about five hundred men to patrol the street at night and to protect the rear of the city, the northeastern side of Medina, where the dwellings of Banu Qurayza were located.

Abu Sufyan besieging Medina

Abu Sufyan hoping to ransack Medina in the first wave of his attack, had a surprise waiting for him. The legions of various Arab tribes thundering down towards Medina were suddenly halted by the sight of a deep trench lining the exposed side of the Medinite terrain with an earthen wall towering behind it. They had never seen such kind of defense and were at a loss on how to overcome this. The only tricks up their sleeves were to starve the Muslims out by laying a prolonged siege while waiting for their scouts to find a narrow passage at the trench. Banu Qurayza, by now an active part of the Meccan alliance were busy in distracting Muhammad's army through assassinations, destruction of provisions, or burning of warehouses, but they could not possibly tip the balance in invaders' favor on their own.

World's largest open-air prison in Medina

Muslims, although relatively secure behind the trench, could not sustain the overly prolonged siege. Tribesmen of Banu Qurayza were indeed proving to be the menace exposing the northeastern defenses of their city. There were occasional venturing of Banu Qurayza swordsmen approaching the houses full of women, children, and the elderly for an easy kill. Food supplies were running short as Medinites were overburdened with the people from suburbia being sheltered in their homes and other buildings. Nightly curfews, patrols by the Medinite soldiers, occasional ambushes from Banu Qurayza, and random dead bodies appearing every other morning, created an atmosphere of extreme fear and anxiety in Medina.

Hypocrites were proving to be the most effective demoralizing media in favor of the invaders.⁸⁹ There were dissensions everywhere, people who had never lifted a sword in their lives

were spewing out strange solutions, some suggesting to negotiate with Abu Sufyan, others blaming the Prophet's supposed lack of political foresight in the exile of Banu Nadir, yet others suggesting Muhammad's principled adherence to the Constitution of Medina bringing this misery on them.

Allied forces were camped just a few miles away; neighing of their horses, grunting of their camels, the drums, the music, the singing of the intoxicated soldiers, the loud poetry readings aimed at demoralizing the Muslims, and in between all this the intermittent barrage of arrows towards Muhammad's army was playing havoc with the nerves of the Medinites. Muslims had, for the first time, missed their daily obligatory prayers only to make them up later.⁹⁰

Ali neutralizing the attack behind the trench

Amr b. Abd Wudd, Nawfal, Zarrar, and Ikrama finding a narrow patch managed to scale the defenses of the trench and suddenly appeared in front of the Muslims challenging a one on one duel. Amr b. Abd Wudd's presence was indeed troubling, he was the master swordsman, the best lancer, one of the most skilled in single combat, and was even more deadly without his horse than mounted. Among Bedouin Arabs, he was known as the 'warrior equal to a thousand combatants' due to an incident in which he was guarding a trade expedition and had single-handedly managed to make hundreds of the raiders fled.⁹¹

Amr appearing next to the Prophet's camp dared the Muslims to come forward so he could send them to their heaven. Ali stepped forward, but the Prophet asked him to stand down, hoping someone else would come forward this time. But Muslims knowing the reputation of Amr as the most ruthless warrior of Arabia kept sitting idle as if they hadn't heard

anything. Amr again yelled at Medinites, mocking them of their cowardice, but yet nobody came forward. Ali again stood up but was stopped for someone else to muster up the courage. Finally, Amr planting his spear in the ground, yelled at the Holy Prophet, addressing him, "My throat has gone bad, screaming out to you to send someone to fight me. And I am standing here while your braves are full of fear. On occasions when all runaway, I stand firm."⁹²

On hearing this, the Holy Prophet asked Ali to go and terminate this threat. But before Ali could go, the Prophet adorned his own turban on Ali's head, put his own shield on Ali's chest, armed him with Dhulfiqar, and sent Ali on with praise that is still glorified in the history of the battles that Muhammad was forced to fight. As Ali stepped forward with calculated steps, his head held high; teeth gritted together, the hilt of Dhulfiqar clutched tightly in his hands, sharply eyeing his enemy, the Holy Prophet declared, "He is the embodiment of all Faith going to encounter the embodiment of all Unbelief."⁹³

As Ali faced Amr, he admonished him by saying, "Don't be in a hurry, because the one who has come to face you is the one who is not helpless to fight you. I'm the one who is the owner of the righteousness and the oracle of the right path. I'm truthful and the helper of the successful ones. I'm here hoping that very soon people will be attending your last rites with my sharp blow that will remain illustrious even after the animosities are over."

Amr exclaimed in wonder, "Who is that who dares to speak to me in this way?" Ali countered, "I am Ali ibn Abi Talib, cousin, and son-in-law of the Messenger of Allah." Amr said: "By Allah, your father was my friend, and I don't want to raise you on my spear and suspend you between the earth and the sky so that

you neither die nor live.” Ali said: “My cousin, the Holy Prophet has informed me that if you kill me, I will go to Paradise and you will go to Hell and if I kill you, I will go to Paradise and you will go to Hell.”

Amr remarked in ridicule: “Both ways you stand to benefit. Is it your destiny that you are prepared to accept?” Ali scolded him by saying, “Quiet! It is known that you had vowed while holding the curtain of the Ka’ba that if anyone offered you three conditions in a battle, you would accept one condition. So I offer you three conditions from which you may accept one.”

Now Ali valiantly offered him a chance to live by saying, “You must testify the oneness of Allah and accept the message of the Prophet and become a Muslim.” He said, “This I cannot do.” Ali said, “Then turn back and persuade your allies to lift the siege. If the Holy Prophet is true, and his religion is established, it will bring honor to all of you. And if he is a liar and not a prophet, the bandits and thieves of Arabs would protect you from his mischief.” He said, “I reject this too because the women of Qureish would laugh at me, and the poets would verify my cowardice that I did not help those who had appointed me as their leader.” Ali said, “Then the third condition is that you are mounted, and I am on foot, so come down.”

He at once jumped down and shooed away his horse, and said in amazement: “This condition I had never expected from any Arab.” Then he launched an attack that Ali absorbed at his shield. He attacked again and gave such a blow that Ali’s helmet was cut into two injuring his head. Now Ali attacked until both were embroiled in the flying dust as they both maneuvered left and right, attacking and stopping each other’s blows. Both sides were watching this duel dumbfounded as the whole Arabia

knew of the skills of Amr, and not even the Muslims expected Ali to survive. Only the Prophet was standing there in full calmness since only he knew who truly Ali was. On seeing each blow of Ali, the Prophet would say something in his praise, until on one particular blow the Holy Prophet exclaimed, "Today, each blow of Ali is more valuable in front of God than the worship of both djinns and humans until the judgment day."⁹⁴ Soon they heard the loud cry of Allah o Akbar, 'God is Greater' from the dust cloud. As the dust settled, Ali came out with Amr's dead body lying covered in his own blood.

As was the custom among Arabs, the victor used to rip away the valuables such as rings, shields, swords, daggers, helmets, other ornaments, even strip the clothes from the opponent's body. Ali didn't even take a second look at his slain opponent and walked away. When people asked Ali to do so, he replied he could not stand to see a man naked. When Amr's sister asked who had killed her brother, people told her it was Ali. She replied, "If anyone else had killed him, I would have mourned for him until eternity."

The other three, who had been standing there watching the duel from the Meccan side, turned back and ran towards the trench. Ikrama and Zarrar made it back, but Nawfal's horse could not leap wide enough, throwing him in the ditch. Muslims started throwing rocks at him, at which he shamed them, demanding to be fought and be killed like a warrior. Ali descended into the trench and fulfilled his wish. The family of Nawfal was rich; they offered a huge sum of money for his corpse, the Holy Prophet said, "We don't accept money for a corpse, they can take it away." With Amr's death began the doom of the Qureish.

Qureish in despair

The Qureish, both furious and frightened at the losses of the day, paraded through the trench the whole night in command of shrewd Khalid looking for an opening to settle the score. Nobody dared to scale the trench first unless accompanied by the whole battalion behind him. The Muslim defenses were strong, and although fielding one-fourth of the force, Meccans had vested, were guarding the weak points with diligence. Every time a contingent used to come close by, the Muslims gathered to shower them with projectiles to push them back. The ten thousand strong armies of Abu Sufyan was reduced to a useless horde of disgruntled men needed to be fed in the day and entertained at night.

Soon the elements started taking the toll on the invaders. Cold winds and moisture brought diseases and discomfort. They hadn't come prepared for a siege; this was supposed to be a couple of days worth of affair with allied forces coming in droves, razing Medina to the ground, killing Muhammad and his followers on the spot, taking their families captives, and returning Mecca victorious singing the praises of Hobal and Uzza. Instead, the siege was becoming unbearable with every passing day. Animals were dying daily; desertions were increasing among the Bedouin conscripts; even some allied tribes were mulling the departure.

Abu Sufyan knew the patience of his men was running thin. One day he decided to call in the general invasion from the quarters of Banu Qurayza. He sent his spies to Banu Qurayzas to work out the invasion plan asking Banu Qurayza to attack Muslims in the morning while Meccans and Banu Nadir would follow them at noon. Foreseeing the futile end and regretting their bad choice, Banu Qurayza demanded Abu Sufyan to hand over his

tribal chiefs to Banu Qurayza as their guarantee that they would follow up on their promise. They didn't want to attack unilaterally and be massacred by the Muslims due to Meccans not backing them up. Abu Sufyan grew suspicious of Banu Qurayza, thinking they had worked out a deal with Muhammad and were making this demand only to hand over the Meccan chiefs to Muhammad. Meanwhile, the Bedouin tribesmen having no ideological reason to fight this unusual war in which most of their day was spent in securing their tents from flying away, were already leaving in droves.

Abu Sufyan leading a disgraceful retreat

One night the Holy Prophet promising paradise to anyone who would venture out in the enemy camp to bring back their news personally asked Abu Bakr to undertake the adventure. He replied, "I ask pardon of Allah and His Prophet."⁹⁵ The Prophet asked Omar to do the same; he refused as well. Huzaifa took up the challenge and entered the enemy camp under cover of the night. There he found a city of dead that used to be the Meccan camp; with cold winds howling through the overturned tents, ripped banners fluttering on the stakes, campfires unattended and burned out, large cauldrons flipped over, scattered carcasses of war camels being fought over by the stray dogs, paddocks empty of cavalry horses, and multitudes of agitated men idly sitting by, itching to pick fights with each other. The vile stench of death was everywhere, a scene reminiscent of the destruction of the Elephant Army that had invaded Banu Hashim's Mecca some sixty years ago. Huzaifa returned jubilantly and informed the Holy Prophet of the utter destruction of the mighty allied forces of Abu Sufyan. The Prophet instantly bowed down in gratitude, and a heavenly revelation recalled the moment, "O' you who have believed, recall the favor of Allah upon you when armies came to attack

you, and We sent upon them a wind and the formations of angels that you did not see. And Allah ever sees what you do.”⁹⁶

Early in the morning, Abu Sufyan hastily climbing his camel, took his flight back to Mecca. The rest of the coalition, which was expecting this retreat order, immediately followed suit. Khalid rode out last with two hundred mounted troopers to stop any chasing battalion of the Muslims, of which there was none. As the sun dawned on the valley in the morning, Muslims found vultures circling the abandoned campsite. The battle of Khandaq was over after twenty-four days of tough siege but with only a few casualties among the Muslims.

RESPONDING TO THE TREASON

The next morning, the Holy Prophet returned to the city of Medina from his forward base near the outskirts. It had been his habit to visit his beloved daughter Fatima immediately before leaving the town and immediately after returning. This time too, he went to see Fatima first before going to his apartment. As he was washing his hands, Gabriel approached and after paying proper salutations, informed him that God wanted him to lay the siege of Banu Qurayza. Muhammad instantly sent Ali with his banner and followed right behind him, summoning his army.

Banu Qurayza resisting the arrest

Banu Qurayza, not expecting such a fast reprisal of their treason, burrowed themselves in the safety of their neighborhood. Once they started feeling the pain of the siege similar to which they had helped inflict on their Muslim neighbors, they asked the Prophet to allow their old friend Abu Lobaba of Banu Aws to enter in for a consultation. Abu Lobaba knowing the mood in Medina, through his hand gesture around his neck, informed them of their certain doom. This created a mixed feeling in their elders; some suggested the resistance while others the quick surrender. The resistance group prevailed, and the siege lasted for twenty-five days after which they surrendered, hoping to win the same clemency from the Prophet that their cousins in Banu Qaynuqa and Banu Nadir had negotiated after their treason offenses.

Their only ask the Holy Prophet consented to was their request to let Sa'd bin Mo'azh decide their fate. Sa'd was the leader of the Banu Aws tribe of Medina and an old-time ally of Banu Qurayza from the civil war times. Sa'd was also a co-signatory of

the Constitution of Medina. For the past three years, he too had experienced firsthand the repeated treasons of the Jewish tribes of Medina at the most precarious of moments. He also had seen the Holy Prophet letting them go free twice out of his mercy and compassion, and not applying the Torah Law which they had themselves demanded.

Sa'd had recently been injured badly in the battle of Khandaq and was brought in leaning on a few of his tribesmen. As he approached, the Banu Qurayza surrounded him from all sides, offering him bribes, reminding him of their friendship of the past, begging for his mercy. Some men from Banu Aws also tried to intercede on behalf of the Jewish tribesmen. Sa'd after pondering for a while, calmly turned to his people and demanded their oath of agreement of whatever he was going to decide. After some hesitation, they all agreed. Sa'd turning towards Banu Qurayza decreed according to the Jewish law of Deuteronomy,⁹⁷ sentencing all fighting-age men to death, remaining taken as prisoners, and their property divided between the aggrieved party.

The Prophet's leniency

The sentence was executed as decreed; even now, the Holy Prophet allowed the Muslims of Banu Aws tribe to hold the hand of any Banu Qurayza Jew they had the friendship with and to walk away.⁹⁸ Many men of Banu Qurayza were spared in this way, most of whom later left Medina. From the Muhajirun side, Omar and Al-Zubair took part in the most executions. Banu Aws also carried many executions by the decree.⁹⁹

Banu Mustaliq planning a surprise attack

Banu Mustaliq was a Jewish tribe living between Medina and Mecca. They had taken part in Abu Sufyan's previous

expeditions on Medina. In the 6 AH, soon after the news of the treason and of the fate of Banu Qurayza spread across Arabia, their chief Harith b. Abi Dirar decided to ambush Muslims in a time when they were expecting the least aggression from any side. The news reached the Holy Prophet through his allies, who decided to confront Harith's tribesmen before they could attack Medina. Muhammad gave Ali his banner and surprised the Banu Mustaliq tribesmen in a quick raid before they could make their move on Medina. They soon gave up after a few of their warriors were terminated, and Muslims returned victorious with two hundred captives. The daughter of Harith converted to Islam on their way to Medina and married the Holy Prophet. All of the captives were set free in celebration of the marriage, and a threat from a hostile tribe was permanently neutralized with the least number of casualties.¹⁰⁰

The futility of the Cascading Wars

With every new war on Medina, the Muslims got stronger and more resourceful, and the Prophet's Mission more secure. With every revolt, Medina became more peaceful due to his Mission's enemies being removed from the city and their empty houses used for housing the new converts, many of whom used to prefer to stay with the Prophet after being banished from their families and tribes.

His enemies learned that they could not destroy Muhammad's Mission by attacking Medina any longer. They had to change their tactics; foremost among them was to keep the Muslims constantly insecure and vulnerable throughout Arabia and to not let the Prophet's Message reach to the rest of Arabia.

God allowed the Holy Prophet to respond to any new aggression away from Medina and not wait to be attacked

Section X: RESUMING THE POLITICS OF PEACE

Expecting his enemies to leave him alone for some time, the Holy Prophet soon resumed his efforts towards a long-term and sustainable peace in Arabia, without which his Mission could not succeed. The Holy Prophet decided to extend the olive branch to the rest of Arabia and beyond.

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MECCANS CONCEDING PEACE AT HODAYBIA

From the day the Holy Prophet had arrived in Medina, he had been busy establishing it as a beacon of peace and order in lawless Arabia. Constitution of Medina and the Code of Brotherhood were but two examples of these efforts. But with his formidable enemies bent on destroying his Mission, most of his resources were being wasted on either quelling internal rebellions or repelling the external aggressions. After the cascading wars were halted, leaving his enemies to their own devices, he soon resumed his efforts to introduce his Message to the rest of Arabia and the neighboring nations.

Muhammad ordered to perform the Hajj al-Asghar

As was the custom of Arabs, after every major event in their lives, they used to come for circumambulation of Ka'ba, popularly known as 'Tawaf'. Even the returning pagans, who were now getting used to their serial defeats from their successive wars on Medina, first used to come to Ka'ba for Tawaf before getting themselves busied in their trades for the next war. It had been over six years that the Prophet had not visited the Ka'ba. One night, in a dream, he was ordered to perform his Hajj al-Asghar or Omra in company with the Muhajirun and Ansaar. Muhammad found this a perfect opportunity to extend the olive branch to his most diehard enemies in Banu Umayya and others in Qureish.

On the 1st of the month of Dhu al-Qidha, 6 AH, the Holy Prophet ordered the preparations for the Hajj al-Asghar. Muhajirun were glad to hear the edict on accounts of visiting their ancestral homes and the families they had left behind. Ansaar were happy to hear of their first pilgrimage under the

guidance of the Holy Prophet, something that all Muslims had been looking forward to for a very long time now.

The month of Dhu al-Qidha was one of the four sacred months in Arabia, and no war or violence was expected either from the Meccans or from their allied tribes on the way to Mecca. The Prophet ordered to carry provisions only for the intention of pilgrimage and nothing else. Seventy camels were taken along for the pilgrimage sacrifice. The Holy Prophet ordered to carry no arms other than the travelers' swords, and they also sheathed. Fourteen hundred Muslims gathered to perform Omra with the Holy Prophet. His wife, Umm Salama, was accompanying him on this journey.

Qureish stopping Muslims from Omra

News of the Prophet's departure from Medina reached to the Meccans. They sent some spies to find out the motive of the Prophet and his devotees and found them traveling without any weapons. The Meccans having waged three menacing wars in as many years couldn't believe that Muhammad would be arriving with fourteen hundred of his men only to perform Omra. They themselves would not have done so; diseased by their own rancor towards Muslims, the Qureish leadership presumed that some stunt was being played on them by the Muslims.

They assembled a large force to confront Muslims and camped a few miles out of Mecca, squarely in the path of the incoming pilgrims. They sent a forward force of two hundred strong cavalries under the command of Khalid and Ikrama to ascertain Muhammad's real intentions.

The Holy Prophet diverting towards Hodaybia

The Holy Prophet was hearing the news of Qureish assembling their forces against his pilgrimage caravan. For Muslims and

other Arabs living in the outskirts of Mecca, this was something very sacrilegious. The month of Dhu al-Qidha was not meant for fighting or violence of any kind. Muhammad, as soon as he saw the Meccan's forward cavalry was heading towards them in the distance, diverted his entourage towards the area called Hodaybia, an area on the fringes of the sacred outline of Mecca. The Holy Prophet didn't want to give any pretext for aggression in his attempt to uphold the sanctity of this sacred month at all costs.

As soon as they reached the place of Hodaybia, Prophet's camel made an abrupt stop in the valley in an area that had no water source close by. People understood this as a sign from the Holy Prophet and started setting up their camp. It was the habit of Arabs, the first errand after setting up the camps used to be to fetch water for the humans and animals. Searching around, they found some abandoned wells in the area that were filled with earth due to years of disuse. The Holy Prophet staked a spike in one of the wells, and the water quickly started flowing in the bottom.

The indefinite bickering of Meccans

Meccans sent three negotiation parties to the Prophet one after another. They all carried the same message that they won't allow Muslims to enter the sacred outskirts of Mecca. They came and inspected Muslims up close, saw no weapons, no preparation for any war, noticed the marked camels reserved for ritual sacrifice, but they remained adamant on not allowing Muslims to enter Mecca. From the Muslims side, the Holy Prophet first sent a young man riding the Prophet's marked camel to assure the Meccans that his intentions were only the Omra, and he meant no harm to anyone. Some Meccans youth confronted him so badly that he would have been killed had one

kind Meccan not intervened and helped him to escape away. Hatred was running deep in them, successive aggressions, and then resulting defeats had only made them more resentful of Muhammad, his Mission, and the people who had chosen to follow him.

After his return, the Holy Prophet asked Omar to go to Mecca to negotiate on their behalf.¹⁰¹ Omar excused by saying that almost all of his tribe had left Mecca, and there was no one to protect him there. He suggested sending Othman b. Affan instead, he was related to Abu Sufyan and had a big family there. Othman assured the Qureish that Muslims would venture only to the areas close to the Ka'ba, would undertake only the necessary rites, and leave quickly after offering their ritual sacrifice. Meccans responded that they had vowed by their god Uzza not to let Muslims make the pilgrimage at least in this visit, but would not mind if Othman performed pilgrimage on his own. Othman refused as he didn't want to offer the pilgrimage while the Prophet and other Muslims were kept out. This whole episode of Othman negotiating with Meccans took much longer than expected until someone spread the rumor that Othman had been killed in Mecca.

The Prophet demanding the pledge of allegiance

Then came the moment immortalized in the book of God. The Prophet resting under the tree summoned all of his followers who had traveled with him. He, expecting a more severe action of the Qureish after the rumored murder of Othman, wanted to test the resolve of the Muslims who were greatly outnumbered and dangerously under-armed. He wanted his community to practice unity in its true sense, equating Muslims with one human frame, 'a pain in one part would pain the whole body'. Othman's murder, if indeed true, couldn't have been ignored.

Under the tree, the Holy Prophet took the oath of obedience from each one of them on the three things; a pledge of complete adherence to his commands, a guarantee to never run away from the battlefield, and the commitment of fighting until the end in case of war. The oath was famously called the 'Pledge under the Tree' or the Bayt Ridhwan as the divine message revealed, "Indeed Allah was pleased with the believers, when they pledged allegiance to you under the tree, and He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down tranquility upon them, and rewarded them with an imminent victory."¹⁰² God and His Prophet were satisfied with the pledge of his followers. Those who were with the Holy Prophet in this journey used to boast on account of this pledge due to God's pleasure revealed about them. Those who couldn't join in used to regret missing it.

Muhammad mitigating the hostilities

The news was out that the Muslims were traveling unarmed. Expecting no major resistance, a party of eighty Meccans set out to hunt any Muslim left behind or ventured too far from the group. The party was soon captured and brought to the Prophet for justice, who treated them graciously and released them shortly. This had Meccans reconsider their hard stance on the issue of pilgrimage for Muslims, but again some egos came in the way. By this time, Abu Sufyan had been informed of the Pledge of Allegiance. As the past wars had shown him, Muhammad needed only one-tenth of his true followers to confront his more numerous enemies. Sensing Muslims' upbeat morale and Qureish's lack of appetite for an actual war against a committed enemy, Abu Sufyan dispatched an envoy to negotiate some compromise arrangement. To calm tempers down, Othman was soon let go, who showing up alive pulled

the whole Muslim camp out of the suspense of an imminent war.

The victory of the Holy Prophet in winning the Peace

Muhammad and Abu Sufyan both knew that the lasting peace suited the blossoming of Muhammad's Mission in Arabia, just like the perpetual war suited Abu Sufyan's goal of sabotaging it. Carrying only the garments of pilgrimage and the animals of sacrifice, the Prophet had come so far to Mecca only in peace, and peace was his only demand.

By successfully maneuvering the events of the past few hours, events which were in no way of his own making, the Holy Prophet had so wisely herded Abu Sufyan towards conceding the Peace that the Prophet so wanted and Abu Sufyan so despised.

Reluctant negotiations

Qureish sent Sohail b. Amr, along with a few others to negotiate a face-saving settlement. After long discussions and lots of back and forth consultations, the terms of peace were settled, and the moment came to scribe them. The Holy Prophet handpicked Ali, his vicegerent, to write the treaty on his dictation. As Ali started to write "In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent and the Most Merciful," Sohail objected, saying it should have begun the way Qureish used to do it, with the words "In Your name, O' God." The Prophet yielded and asked Ali to rewrite in Qureish's way. Next, the Prophet dictated Ali to write, 'This is the treaty made between Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah, and Sohail bin Amr', as Ali finished writing, Sohail again objected, saying the whole contention of Qureish was about Muhammad being considered the Prophet of Allah. He demanded the Prophet to have his name written instead with

his father's connection like 'Muhammad, son of Abd Allah'. The Prophet asked Ali to erase 'Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah' and instead write what Sohail had demanded. Ali hesitated and respectfully said it was too much for him to erase the phrase 'Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah' on which the Prophet himself erased it and had 'Muhammad, son of Abd Allah' written on the treaty.¹⁰³ At this moment, Muhammad told Ali that in not too distant future, he too would have to suffer through similar insolent bickering. The prophecy was fulfilled about thirty years later when Muawiyah, son of Abu Sufyan, rebelled against Ali's just rule, and a similar treaty was concluded.¹⁰⁴

Terms of the Peace Treaty of Hodaybia

The peace treaty of Hodaybia, although it came as an unintended byproduct of the aborted Omra, had some very consequential terms agreed in a very simple language. The treaty called for ending all hostilities for the next ten years with no party attacking the other or their allies. Any clan or a tribe would have full liberty to strike a deal or come in treaty with Muhammad or with Qureish. If any individual who joins Muhammad and moves to Medina, and is claimed back by his or her guardian, Muhammad would be obliged to send him or her back. If any follower of Muhammad wishes to rejoin Qureish, Muhammad would not be able to demand his or her return. Muhammad and his followers would postpone their pilgrimage this year and go back to Medina without entering the holy boundary of Mecca. Next year, Muslims as a group may return for pilgrimage for which Qureish would empty Mecca for only three days. If Muslims choose to come next year, they will come unarmed except their traveler swords sheathed and wrapped. The Holy Prophet gave one copy to Sohail and kept the original with him.

Muhammad's commitment to the terms

While the treaty was being negotiated and still not finalized yet, Abu Jundal, son of Meccan's chief negotiator Sohail, escaped to the Muslim camp. He had converted to Islam a while back but was being imprisoned by his father to stop him from joining Muhammad. Sohail demanded his return; in the spirit of the terms being worked on, the Prophet asked him to go back to his father. He started crying, on which the Prophet advised him of patience and assured him of a near victory and a relief from his situation.

Rants and Raves of Muslims against the Peace Treaty

Some of the followers, specifically those from Muhajirun, were not particularly satisfied with the terms and conditions of the treaty.¹⁰⁵ Either frustrated at not visiting Ka'ba, which they had so eagerly longed for, or disappointed at not visiting their ancestral homes, or too shortsighted to appreciate the wisdom of the Prophet, some Muhajirun expressed their loud opposition to the treaty in a very disrespectful way. Omar b. Khattab, in particular, was very vocal, saying, "Before today I had not doubted the status of the Prophet of God so strongly." Going even further, he questioned the Holy Prophet, saying, "Are you not the true Prophet of Allah?" The Prophet replied, "I am, no doubt." Omar questioned further, "Are we not in the right and our opponents in the wrong?" on which the Holy Prophet assured him, "Of course we are in the right and our adversaries in the wrong." Omar again asked: "Why should we then put a blot on our Faith, and bear the disgrace of humiliation?" The Holy Prophet replied affectionately, "I am only a Messenger of Allah and can do nothing against His will; He will help me." Omar not satisfied with the Prophet's answer went to Abu Bakr and repeated these sentences to him, adding, "Had these terms been fixed by another other than

Muhammad, even by a commander of my own appointment, I would have scorned to listen to him.”¹⁰⁶ Omar and some other followers were the same people who only a day ago had pledged their complete obedience to the Holy Prophet.

Ignoring the rudeness of these naysayers, the Holy Prophet went ahead and ordered to complete the pilgrimage rituals right then and there before heading back. The rituals consisted of sacrificing the camels signifying a ‘person would uphold God’s command above his own life’ and the shaving of the heads, meaning the ‘person had accepted only the God as his Master’ and nobody else. In Arab tradition, the slaves as soon as sold to their masters had their heads shaved off, differentiating them from the unsold ones.

Many people who had similar inclinations as Omar, didn’t pay attention to the Prophet’s wishes. The Holy Prophet was extremely disappointed in their disrespectful behavior. He mentioned this to his wife, Umm Salama. Umm Salama suggested to unilaterally perform what Allah had commanded him, letting those who obeyed him, follow him, and leave the disobedient ones to their own devices. Prophet came out of his tent and completed the pilgrimage rituals as commanded by God. Emulating him, many of his sincere devotees did what he had done; others who felt left out gradually followed the Prophet a little while later.

After about twenty day stay in Hodaybia, the Holy Prophet started his return journey. He had traveled a few miles towards Medina when the revelations came to him, assuring him of the clear victory soon.¹⁰⁷ The doubting party taunted if the victory God had promised was similar to the one that God had promised them a few days ago of entering Mecca without

opposition. The Holy Prophet replied, “Indeed God had promised that, but when did He promise that it would be in that same year?”¹⁰⁸

Gains of the Peace Treaty of Hodaybia

The Holy Prophet, despite the distrust of some of his comrades, and to the chagrin of Abu Sufyan, had come back triumphant from Hodaybia. His graceful sagacity had earned him peace for the unabated propagation of his Message, which had been denied to him up until a few months ago due to the constant violence and mayhem at his borders.

The results of the peace deal that the Holy Prophet had eked out of his Mission’s vicious enemies were apparent from the day he started heading back to Medina. The resistance and scorn that the Muslims had faced on their way to Mecca had suddenly fizzled out. Large families, clans, and tribes were free to side with Muslims. New alliances were formed soon after the deal. People to people interaction fostered, letting people hear the message of the Prophet without the fear of violence. What Omar had misjudged as humiliating conditions, turned out to be the many folds advantage for the Holy Prophet’s Mission. Those who accepted Islam while living in Mecca and were forced to remain there became the biggest preachers of their new faith there. Those who somehow made to Medina to accept the Message and were forced to go back to Mecca brought along with them more tenets of their new faith. Those who traveled outside of the boundaries of Hijaz had a free hand in spreading their Prophet’s Mission in peace, unlike those Muslims who years ago had to flee to Abyssinia only to be chased by the Qureish elites. Before the Qureish could again erect barriers in its way, Muhammad’s Mission reached every town and valley of the Arabian Peninsula. Although still too early to be the

MECCANS CONCEDING PEACE AT HODAYBIA

dominant religion throughout, the new faith was piquing people's interest everywhere its adherents traveled in Arabia.

EXPORTING THE REVOLUTION

As the new year of 7 AH dawned, the Prophet's Mission finally started to recover from the gloomy days of serial assaults on his sanctuary of Medina. The Peace Treaty of Hodaybia had certainly provided the breather to his missionary efforts by providing relative security to him and his followers. The Holy Prophet used this opportunity to introduce his Message to people outside the Arabian Peninsula. He started vetting men to take his message far and wide from his city-state of Medina.

The Prophet carefully choosing his envoys

Many among Muhajirun and Ansaar had been part of the trade expeditions to Yemen, Syria, and other regions in the yesteryears and were not strangers to the foreign lands and cultures, but very few among them possessed the qualities of being the Prophet's messengers. For the Holy Prophet, the integrity of the carriers of his Message was critical, since now his Message was to be transmitted to those who never had heard such a sublime Message before and had seen anybody practicing it.

Those who were selected were able to speak the local languages and were familiar with the cultures they were sent to. They were men of true grit who could present themselves in the fancy courts of the resourceful kings without feeling embarrassed about their austerity. They were also of sharp wit and cool demeanor so they could respond to serious questions and the unexpected barbs, and were extremely dependable and trustworthy. One characteristic that truly made these men rise above the rest; they had internalized the Prophet's Message well. Like Jaffer son of Abu Talib, who had been representing

Muhammad in Abyssinia for the past many years, these men were the pristine examples of the Prophet's Message, both in its comprehension and in its application in their lives.

This was emphasized by a similar event in the future when another envoy was hastily sent towards the hostile polytheists of Mecca. Abu Bakr was heading a group of men for Hajj and was ordered to announce the new policy of the Prophet of God towards the violent hooligans of Mecca, who used to go around Ka'ba in the state of complete nakedness. Abu Bakr was only halfway in towards Mecca when God ordered Muhammad to either take the message himself or send someone who was from him. Ali was immediately dispatched by the Prophet to discharge Abu Bakr from this duty and take immediate charge of the envoy to fulfill the command of God.¹⁰⁹ Arriving in Mecca, Ali immediately went to the station where people were pelting rocks at the place where the Satan had appeared in front of the Prophet Abraham to tempt him against God's commandment about Ishmael, and boldly delivered those verses of Qur'an to the huge crowds of polytheists.¹¹⁰

Envoy to the Persian Empire

Abd Allah b. Huzaifa was sent to neighboring Persia with a letter from the Holy Prophet. Persian Empire at the time was going through one of its most glorious periods and was ruled by the powerful Sassanid emperor Chosroes II or 'Khusraw II'. Chosroes himself was aware of monotheism since his wife was a Christian by faith, and he used to endow the Christian churches throughout his expansive kingdom generously. The contents of the letter that invited the emperor to the Message of the Holy Prophet read:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Khusraw - the chief of the Persians

Peace be upon him, who follows the religious guidance and expresses belief in God and His Prophet and testifies that there is no god but Allah and that He has no partner, and who believes that Muhammad is His servant and His Prophet.

Under the Command of God, I invite you to Him. He has sent me for the guidance of all people so that I may warn them of His displeasure and may present the unbelievers with divine evidence. Embrace Islam so that you may remain safe from His anger. If you refuse to accept Islam, you will be responsible for all the sins of the Zoroastrians.”¹¹¹ The Holy Prophet had warned him of the misguidance of his people because most of the people used to follow their kings in their religion.

Khusraw tore up the letter in pieces yelling at Abd Allah, “How dare a slave of mine wrote this to me and put his name next to mine?” He immediately issued a decree to his viceroy in Yemen to send a couple of men to Medina and arrest the man who wrote such a letter. Abd Allah, on his return, related the whole event to the Holy Prophet, who, upon hearing this utter arrogance, made a supplication to God, asking Him, “Like the way he had ripped the letter, snatch away his empire from him.”

The viceroy of Yemen sent two of his bravest men to Medina. They obviously returned empty-handed but were so awestruck to see the greatness of the Prophet, who, in their own words, “was humble and used to sit on the floor,” that they converted to Islam in Medina before heading back. Before their return, the Holy Prophet had foretold them of the murder of their king Khusraw II at the hands of his son Kavadh. The viceroy in

Yemen, on hearing the details of the Prophet's lifestyle, and having verified the prediction about the Persian Emperor also accepted Islam.¹¹²

Envoy to Byzantine

Dahyah b. Khaleefa al-Kalbi was another ambassador who took the message of the Prophet to the Eastern Empire of Rome, also known as the Byzantine. Heraclius was the Christian Monarch of Byzantine. Dahyah arrived in the season when many trade expeditions used to travel from the peninsula to Syria. When he was brought to the emperor, Heraclius was in an anxious state on account of a dream he had seen the previous night. On the emperor's inquiry, Dahyah told him, "A person has emerged among us claiming to be the prophet. Some of us believe him and obey him, and some of us oppose him, due to which we have much hatred and wars between us." Curious to find more about him, the emperor ordered his cops to find anyone related to the new Prophet traveling to Syria. Incidentally, Abu Sufyan heading a trade expedition was there at the moment and was brought in front of the emperor. The first question the king asked was about the family rank of the Prophet, on which Abu Sufyan replied that he was one of the noblest of births in Mecca. He asked if anyone else from Mecca had claimed to be the prophet on which Abu Sufyan replied in negative. Heraclius asked if the rich men followed him first, or did his faith spread among the poor first, Abu Sufyan answered the poor ones. The emperor asked if their number increase or decrease, Abu Sufyan grudgingly replied they increase. Was anyone ashamed of the Prophet's creed after they accepted him? The king asked. Abu Sufyan said no one that he knew. He asked was Muhammad a man of lies and deceits before he claimed his prophetic status, Abu Sufyan said opposite he was considered the most truthful one among us. The emperor asked if they had found him to be

the man of trustworthiness on which Abu Sufyan informed him that they had recently concluded a treaty with him and couldn't predict the outcome of it. Heraclius asked if you have fought wars with him and what was the result? Abu Sufyan said yes, many times, and sometimes he won, and sometimes we did. The king asked what his message was, Abu Sufyan said, he invites us to one God, asks us to disassociate ourselves from the religion of our forefathers, asks us to be chaste, and be generous to the needy among us. The emperor thumping on his chair said if what you have told is true, the new prophet would soon be the owner of this throne.

Abu Sufyan later told Ibn Abbas that had it not be that he was ashamed to tell lies to the king, he would have told him nothing but falsehood. Heraclius now asked Dahyah if he had anything else of the Prophet. Dahyah presented the letter of the Holy Prophet, which was similar to the one the Prophet had written to the Persian monarch. The letter read:

“In the name of Allah, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

This is the letter from Muhammad bin Abd Allah, the Prophet, and the servant of God, to Heraclius - the king of Rome

The peace and blessing of God may be on him who follows the guided direction in the religious practices. Know that I invite you to come to Islam so that you may save yourself from the punishment, both in this world and the next. Obey this command so God may double your rewards. If you do not accept this message, you will be responsible for the misguidance of your subjects, who following your example would not believe.”¹¹³

The Prophet's letter ended with a passage from the verses of the Qur'an referring to the Christians, "Say, O' people of the book, come to a resolution that is nonpartisan between you and us. That we will not worship anyone except God, and would not associate anybody with Him and would not take any one of us superior to the other, except God. But if they turn away, then say, Bear witness that we are the ones submitting to Him."¹¹⁴

Heraclius convinced this was the Messenger of God the earlier prophets had prophesied about sent Dahyah back with valuable gifts to the Holy Prophet but on the guidance of his advisors, remained silent on his acceptance of the new faith.

Envoy to Syria

Shuja b. Wahb was dispatched to Syria carrying the letter addressing the leader of the Banu Ghassan tribe. His name was Harith b. Abi Shimr and was the viceroy of the Byzantine emperor in Damascus. Harith became so furious at the envoy that he detained Shuja. Not knowing a similar discourse was happening around the same time in Byzantine, he sent an alerting note to Heraclius, informing him of a Prophet inviting people to God and His bounties and warning kings and their subjects of His wrath had they not accepted. Heraclius ordered him to treat the envoy with respect and release him with honor and grace. Harith abided and grudgingly sent Shuja back with some gifts to the Prophet. The Holy Prophet hearing of his unwarranted hostility predicted he would soon be removed from his rule. Sure enough, in a few months, he was overthrown, after which he perished in anonymity.

Sending envoys to other littoral states

Other ambassadors were sent to the viceroy of Rome in Egypt and the King of Abyssinia, both of whom received the letters

with the utmost respect and acknowledged the news of the coming of the Last Prophet in their scriptures. Roman viceroy in Egypt hesitated, but Negus, the King of Abyssinia, declared his faith and accepted Islam. Another ambassador was sent to Manzer b. Shazy, the governor of Bahrain who was in the tutelage of the Persian Empire. He accepted Islam in the presence of the Prophet's ambassador, but many in his island didn't and instead agreed to pay yearly tribute to the Holy Prophet. Another similar messenger named Harith b. Omair was murdered on his way to deliver the letter of the Prophet to the governor of Busra in Syria.

By the end of 7 AH, the word of God had reached far and wide; all of the Middle East, the tiny governorates along the Persian Gulf, the Persian Empire itself, the provinces and states under the Byzantines, and most of coastal Africa along the Red Sea had heard of the Message of Muhammad. The Mission was being carried out in its full glory, the Prophet's wisdom in assembling the truce at Hodaybia with the rabidly hostile Meccans was paying off, but Muhammad's test was not over yet.

Section XI: CASCADING WARS - EPISODE TWO

Due to the peace treaty of Hodaybia, the Meccans were quiet for now, but the surroundings of Medina were still insecure due to the aggressive moves of the Prophet's northern neighbors in Khyber. The alliance, the Jewish tribes of Khyber, had struck with the Meccans was likely functioning in the background, creating all sorts of troubles for the Holy Prophet in pursuit of his Mission. The Prophet had to take swift measures against the antagonists to establish the peace that he had so arduously earned in Hodaybia.

DISMANTLING KHYBER FOR GOOD

Banu Nadir, after their expulsion from Medina, had neither forgotten nor forgiven their ejection from the city. Their self-assumed competition with the emerging monotheist faith of Islam and the loss of their unparalleled political influence was too much to swallow for them. Muhammad's revolution had rattled many mafias in Arabia; most ruffled among them were the mafias belonging to the Banu Nadir tribe, trading in arms and other equipment of wars for centuries. These mafias had been feeding off from the decades of bloodshed among pagan Arabs, one tribe siding with one faction, another with the other. Any amount of peace anywhere in Arabia was a death warrant for these war syndicates.

Terrorism around Medina

Due to the treason in the Battle of Uhud, the Banu Nadirs were punished out of the city of Medina. They soon found a new home in Khyber, a Jewish stronghold near Medina, and had taken over the control of the area from the locals. A year after Uhud, they aligned themselves with Abu Sufyan and invaded Medina again but were repulsed in a humiliating defeat in the Battle of Khandaq. But they soon were at their mischief again.

Banu Nadir had found in the pagan Bedouin tribes, largest among them were the Banu Ghataffan, eager mercenaries to keep the insecurity simmering at the borders of Medina. Banu Ghataffan routinely used to raid the pastures of Medinite Muslims and steal away their herds, on their way, killing or kidnapping random men, women, and children. The paymasters in Khyber used to share half of their agriculture produce with Banu Ghataffan to keep the insecurity going, an arrangement

they had negotiated since the time of the Battle of Khandaq. The Holy Prophet had to eventually assemble a small guard to check the terrorist activities of these Bedouin tribes. On one occasion one of the ranger companies, in pursuit of one such terrorist band was completely terminated, their captain Bin Maslama barely managed to reach Medina to recount the disastrous ordeal. Other such incidents were being reported more often and with much higher frequency.

The Jewish tribes of Khyber and their desert allies were fast turning into a deadly threat to the peace and security of Medina. They needed to be restrained quickly. The Treaty of Hodaybia created exactly the opportunity for this undertaking. Abu Sufyan bound in the Hodaybia treaty was at least temporarily defanged and was unable to come to the rescue of his allies in Khyber. God ordered the Holy Prophet to extract this menacing threat out of Medina for good.

Neutralizing Banu Nadir's loyal mercenaries

In Muharram 7 AH, a few weeks after the Hodaybia treaty, the Holy Prophet, along with sixteen hundred of his followers, stealthily marched towards Khyber. Khyber was located around ninety miles north of Medina. Muslims covered this distance in less than three days. Their small size made them an agile force that could move fast, strategically pick and drop targets, and could generally march unnoticed. To keep the element of surprise, they opted to travel through the night and rest during the day.

Bedouins of Banu Ghataffan, alerted only when Muslims were less than a day distance from Khyber, quickly sent a large force to protect their paymasters. Muslims, upon learning their gung-ho ride towards Khyber, promptly changed directions and

reached Al-Rajhi instead, the hometown of Banu Ghataffan tribe. Banu Ghataffan quickly withdrew hearing the news of Muslims heading to their homes while they were out protecting their bosses.¹¹⁵ Now confused about the real size of the Prophet's army, who seemingly could field battalions on multiple fronts, Banu Ghataffan decided to sit idle waiting for the new orders from Khyber. This move effectively neutralized the Banu Ghataffan mercenaries without much bloodshed, alienating Banu Nadir to deal with the Muslims on their own.

By now, the local informants had already started alarming the residents of Khyber of a small Muslim force soon dawning upon them. Confident in their numbers and of their home advantage, they chose not to field a large army against such a small militia. With strong encampments scattered around Khyber, the Jewish strategy was to stop the Holy Prophet through the small pockets of defense they had already constructed for such scenarios. It turned out to be their fatal miscalculation.

Khyber under siege

Holy Prophet rapidly moved on to various castles and fortresses dotted around Khyber. In some cases, the Muslim force was so fast to reach upon their enemies, that the Jewish informants and the army they were informing about arrived simultaneously, not giving ample time to the Khyber residents to properly organize a defense. Their small fortresses fell fairly shortly; the stronger ones fell in a few days of siege.

The final one was the fort of al-Qamus, which was situated on a cliff, naturally protected from all sides, and was considered impregnable. Muslims reached in front of the al-Qamus fort in the morning after about a month out, conquering various fortresses of Khyber on this tiring expedition. They were

running short of both men and supplies. In each capture of a fortress or a dwelling, they had to leave a few men behind to reestablish the order. The Prophet's army by now was reduced to fourteen hundred men, among them two hundred mounted soldiers, compared to the Jewish legions collectively made up of ten thousand warriors, the majority of whom were deployed in al-Qamus.

In the morning, as the Jewish defenders of al-Qamus fort looked down on the determined Muslim camp, victorious so far against all the obstacles in their path, they must have thought of all of the crimes they had been perpetrating against their peaceful neighbors since past few years. They had left no stone unturned in defeating the Prophet's Mission, including continuously feeding sectarian seditions in Medina, persistently sponsoring terrorism around Medina, and repeatedly instigating deadly wars on Medina. This was in addition to all sorts of vile media campaigns that had sprung all over the Arabian Peninsula in the form of poets and influential merchants chasing Muslim preachers away, ridiculing them, mocking them, instigating violence against them, and spreading rumors about them.

As the Holy Prophet approached the final stronghold, he prayed to God, "O' Lord, Supporter of seven heavens and all they overshadow and the Supporter of the seven earths and everything that casts a shade, we implore You to deliver this town and its people to us, and protect us from all harm that this city could inflict upon us."

The Battle of Khyber begins

Muslims made many approaches to the fort, but it required more than the regular raids to conquer it. The Prophet had not assigned the banner to anybody yet. Abu Bakr, on his own, with

Islamic banner in his hand, made an advance one day but came back defeated with some losses. Omar b. Khattab, holding the same standard raided the next day but came back unsuccessful, everybody in the battalion accusing the other of the cowardice.¹¹⁶ It kept happening for about five days until the siege started becoming unbearable for both sides.

Until one day, the Holy Prophet proclaimed, "Tomorrow I will award the standard of the Islamic forces to a man who loves Allah and his Prophet, and Allah and His Prophet love him. He is the one who attacks forcefully and does not run away from the battlefield, and he will not return until Allah grants victory through his hand."¹¹⁷ There was no such guarantee given by the Prophet before today. Any random Muslim selected tomorrow was guaranteed by the Prophet of God to come victorious. But there was a condition to it; the selected person was 'loved by God and His Prophet in the same way he loved God and His Prophet'.

Many among the Prophet's camp spent the night awake so they could be the first in the Prophet's presence before the beginning of the morning prayers. Everybody wanted to be the 'one who was loved by God and His Prophet,' but there was another reason too for such fervent attempts to present themselves to the Prophet. Today the field was wide open to make their marks because Ali was missing for the past couple of days. He had been established as a de facto protector of the Muslims; nobody dared to compete against him, especially in the presence of the Holy Prophet, who used to keep reminding people of Ali being his vicegerent after him.

In his absence, everybody strived to present themselves in front of the Holy Prophet more prominently than anybody else. Some

were found doing weird actions to become prominent so as not to be overlooked. Sa'd b. Waqas suddenly fell flat on the ground as they were lined up in front of the Holy Prophet only to get up later, brushing down his clothes. But the Prophet was looking for someone else in the crowd. He finally asked for Ali to come forward. Many disappointed voices told him in unison that he had his eyes infected due to which he could not see. The Prophet still insisted for him to be presented, finally calling for him out loud for his assistance. As Ali was brought to him, the Holy Prophet pulled him closer affectionately, putting his head in his lap. He then touched his fingers with his own lips and tenderly patted Ali's eyes, curing him of the disease. Ali used to say that he never had any infection in his eyes after that day.¹¹⁸

Muhammad readied Ali with his own hands giving his own banner to him, handing him his sword Dhulfiqar and tying his own armor on his body. Today Ali was adorned with the three distinctions that no one had ever been awarded before. He was guaranteed to never return without a victory, of being the person who was loved by God and His Prophet and was affirmed the person who loved God and His Messenger.

As Ali headed out, he asked the Holy Prophet how long he should fight? The Prophet replied, "Either until you are victorious or they accept Islam. If a single non-Muslim accepts Islam on your invitation, it is better for you than having a herd of one hundred red camels."

Ali put an end to the sedition

Ali charged up the hill next to the gate of the al-Qamus fort and firmly planted the standard of the Prophet in the rocks above. Harith, a Jewish knight, came out and attacked the Muslim battalion coming behind Ali. A few of them were killed until Ali

charged Harith and slew him. His brother, another famous knight, came forward, clad in double armor from head to waist, but was met with the same fate. Then came forward one of the most celebrated knights of the Jewish side. His name was Marhab and was considered the custodian of the gate of the al-Qamus fort. While challenging Ali, he asked for his identification. Ali exclaimed, "I am he whom his mother named Hayder, 'the Lion', I weigh my enemies in a ferocious balance." Saying this, Ali offered Marhab to attack him first. When Ali returned the blows, Marhab was found cut in half from head to his waist along with his heavy armor.

Tempted to avenge their slain captain, more fighters came forward, only to be perished by the sword of Ali; first came Antar, then Rabi', then Zajij, then Dawood, then Morra, and lastly Yasser. The Jewish regiments frightened at the termination of their heavyweights turned back and ran into the safety of the fort only to be chased by Ali in the distance. As Ali approached, the gate was closed shut, and the sky was littered with the shooting arrows from the castle's walls. Ali with his shield protecting his head, leaped over the ditch and rushed towards the gate. As soon as his hands touched the gate, he cast away his shield, whispered the great name of God, and jolted the gate so ferociously that it came off from its hinges. Ali lifted the gate turning it into his shield until the shooting stopped, and the defenders of the fort looking at this marvel with awe started to retreat to the city center. Before today they had only read the fight of Prophet David from their scriptures, today Ali showed them how David used to fight against the enemies of God. Ali placed the giant gate at the ditch making a bridge to let Muslim infantry rush in and capture the city. The gate of the al-Qamus fort was so heavy that multiple people used to push to open and close it in normal days.

Khyber residents punished by Peace

Most of the Khyber residents implored the Holy Prophet to accept half of their yearly produce in return for letting them cultivate the same lands. This was essentially a perfect deal for them; after all, they had been paying the same amount to their Bedouin mercenaries to create troubles for Muslims, now they were to pay the same amount for ensuring peace. The Holy Prophet mercifully agreed since peace for his Mission was more important than any worldly gains. But having stung by their previous turpitudes, the Prophet imposed the condition that they could be ordered to leave whenever subsequent Muslim authorities found it necessary, which was to be based on their future behavior. From past experiences, Muslims had learned that Arabian tribes were more adept at reneging on their treaties than any other talents they may have possessed.

The most evils ones who had the blood of countless innocents on their hands struck a deal to leave Khyber and escape the capital punishment in exchange for leaving their entire asset for the victors. Again this was graciously agreed by the Holy Prophet in order to reduce any further bloodshed between them. Since some of them were known for their deceitful nature, somebody proposed that concealment of any tangible assets should be considered a capital offense, which they eagerly agreed to. Sure enough, few still tried their luck; Kinana, the chief of the al-Qamus fort, was the one who tried to outsmart his captors. Besides financing the most hateful campaigns against Medinite Muslims, he was also guilty of personally murdering a Muslim man named Mahmud b. Maslama by heartlessly crushing him under a millstone. He was subsequently put to death beside a few others. Many of their combatants now conceding the defeat were told to abandon

the Khyber area for good. They were ordered to leave the vicinity carrying only their most necessary provisions.

The Jewish residents of Fadak voluntarily came forward, gifting half of their land to the Prophet and, rather than be subjected to the terms of defeat, won the right to stay on their lands. Muhammad gifted this land to his daughter Fatima, which remained with her until the death of her beloved father. Abu Bakr confiscated this land from her soon after the demise of the Holy Prophet.¹¹⁹ The Jewish settlements of Taima and Wadi al-Qora soon gave way to the Prophet too. The Wadi al-Qora inhabitants did put up a small resistance, but after a few casualties, they agreed to the same terms as their other religious counterparts.

Among other items captured after the conquest, most worrisome was the nature of the armaments and other war machinery that the victorious Muslims discovered in Khyber. There was a siege machine found in the fort of al-Qamus, which was previously unheard of in Arabia. It was a piece of special equipment, most advanced for its age, which was used to break through the fortifications and heavy doors. There were also huge stashes of sabers, shields, lances, spears, helmets, and other armaments that were confiscated from these wars inducing mafias.

Khyber, which had become a primary source of sectarian frictions, covert terrorism, and overt aggressions for Medinite Muslims, was finally brought to its deserving end. Khyber soon faded away from the political landscape of Hijaz, but the Battle of Khyber could never cease to end for either its victors or its losers. The battle of Khyber is still evoked by the inheritors of both factions, in modern flare-ups in the Middle East, echoing

its significance in the end-times prophecies till the establishment of final justice on earth by the promised Messiah.

Fadak remained a confiscated land by the successive governments of caliphs and kings hostile to the progeny of the Holy Prophet.

A Murder attempt once more

Soon after the victory of Khyber, another assassination attempt was unearthed on the life of the Holy Prophet. Marhab's niece Zaynab, enraged at the losses of her uncle and other relatives, managed to infiltrate the kitchen of the Muslim army. She poisoned the Prophet's food with some deadly substance. The Holy Prophet at the last minute managed to spit out the poison, but a veteran and a close associate of the Prophet, Bishr, died on the spot after consuming the poisoned food. The crime was committed in an individual capacity, as no collective murder conspiracy was discovered. Zaynab was soon sent to the gallows.

Ali the Lion of God

During the battle, the Prophet had heard the ode of Ali when he was introducing himself to the Jewish knight Marhab. The mention of Ali's mother must have brought tears to the Prophet's eyes; she had so affectionately raised Muhammad since his childhood. She was his same aunt, who had named his cousin Ali, 'the Hayder', meaning the 'Lion'. Honoring her words for Ali, the Holy Prophet awarded Ali with the famed title of the 'Lion of God', or Asad Allah, similar to the title that his aunt and Ali's mother, Fatima bint Asad gave Ali at his birth.

During the time the title was being bestowed and the wealth of the conquest was being distributed, Jaffer along with his wife Asma b. Omais reached Khyber after spending over twelve years

in Abyssinia. He had been the leader of the Muslims in Abyssinia, those early converts who had fled to Africa in the most fearful days of Qureish's ruthless repression. There he had been the major contributor to the propagation of the Prophet's Mission in the Christian kingdom mostly through his pristine character and his dignified manners. His return made the Holy Prophet so overwhelmingly joyous that he was found saying, "I'm not sure if I'm happier on the return of Jaffer or the victory of Khyber." He gifted Jaffer a distinct supplication that remained a hallmark prayer of the spiritual elevation among Muslims.¹²⁰

The Holy Prophet making up for the aborted Omra

A few months after quelling Khyber and areas surrounding it, in the month of Dhu al-Qidha 7 AH, the Prophet was commanded to do the makeup or 'Qadha' of the Omra he was forced to cut short last year. This was the same Omra, after which the famous Peace Treaty of Hodaybia was signed.

The Prophet traveled with two thousand of his devotees, many of them were those who had to abandon their Omra last year, along with the sacrificial camels and the most basic provisions of the journey. Just like last year, they had with them no arms except the traveler swords wrapped and sheathed in scabbards. Meccans emptied the city for the three days they were there, as was agreed earlier, leaving Ka'ba only for the Muslims. During the mandatory rituals, Bilal the African, by now, the official caller of the Prophet was asked to call the Adhan for the first time from the top of Ka'ba. The Holy Prophet led the first congregation prayers in the vicinity of Ka'ba that year.

THE BATTLE OF MOTA

After his return from the Omra journey, the Prophet must have stayed only a few months in Medina when he heard a very tragic occurrence. The Holy Prophet had dispatched Harith b. Omair to the governor of Busra with a letter to introduce him and other city elites to Islam. Busra was a major Christian city hosting a magnificent cathedral and was located on the road connecting Damascus with the Red Sea. This was the same city where decades ago, the young Muhammad was recognized and revered by a Nestorian monk during his journey to Syria with his dear uncle, Abu Talib.

Background of the Battle of Mota

Muhammad's messenger Harith b. Omair was intercepted by the governor of Banu Ghassan confederate in the vicinity of Mota and was brutally murdered. The governor's name was Shurahbil, and he was a close ally to Heraclius, the Byzantine Emperor. Earlier, the Holy Prophet had a hugely favorable communication with Emperor Heraclius while his Arab viceroy in Damascus hadn't received the Prophet's envoy with such dignity. He had his messenger detained until Heraclius ordered him to be honorably released.

Now Shurahbil al-Ghassani, a governor of the same Arab viceroy, had brutally murdered a messenger of the Holy Prophet for no apparent reason. There could be one explanation though; there were substantial links between the Syrian Arabs and the Banu Umayya clan, which may have triggered this uncalled for hostility. Arab elites of Syria were not strangers to the happenings in Mecca and Medina as trade expeditions between the Qureish and Syria were common. There also were personal

and trade ties between Banu Umayya and the Syrian Arabs for a long time. Abu Sufyan was a known trader in the major Syrian cities, and his Umayyad ancestors were regular refugees here due to their vain competitions with Banu Hashim.

Proving ground for the Pledge under the Tree

Two years ago, immediately before the Treaty of Hodaybia, the Holy Prophet had tested the resolve of his followers when Othman, his envoy to Mecca, was rumored to be killed there. Muhammad had demanded an oath of allegiance from his followers famously known as the 'Pledge under the Tree' in which he had asked for their unwavering support in case of an imminent Meccan offense and had demanded them to never run from the battlefield. Now two years later, the Battle of Mota was just the proving ground for the Muslims to honor their pledge. The circumstances were the same as before, but this time the Prophet's envoy was actually killed as opposed to the last time when it was just a rumor.

A war not waged for the victory

In 8 AH, the Holy Prophet assembled a force of three thousand men assigning Zaid b. Haritha, Jaffer b. Abu Talib, and Abd Allah b. Rawaha as the successive commanders of the Muslim army. The Prophet ordered them to move speedily towards the Roman borders. He also authorized the Muslims to elect their commander had the first three fall in the war.

As the Muslim force reached the outskirts of Jordan, they learned that they were arrayed against the elite emperor guard of the Byzantine army escorting the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius. His champion general Theodore was personally commanding the emperor guard. An equal number of allied Banu Ghassan Arab fighters were also with them.

Fearful of the numerical superiority of their adversary, some Muslims suggested waiting in the desert for the reinforcements to arrive from Medina. But Abd Allah b. Rawaha reminded them of their famed pledge and the wisdom of the Holy Prophet in sending them here on the double while the Byzantine emperor was unusually present in this border town and that the Prophet had intentionally left them outnumbered with the foretelling of the fall of their three stalwart commanders. This instantly galvanized the Muslim fighters who realized that the Holy Prophet had not sent them to win this war but to instill the fear of God in the hearts of his Mission's enemies who seemed to be in the cahoots stretching from Mecca to Syria.

The Muslims engaged in a brief skirmish near the camps of the Roman army only to retreat towards the narrow passages of Mota. Their tactic was to deny the Romans of their numerical advantage by forcing them to fight Muslims in a passage where they could not field a large infantry. On the day of the battle, Muslims outnumbered but determined faced an equally zealous army pitched against them. As the general combat started, the three commanders of the Muslim force fell one after another, as was predicted by the Holy Prophet.

Meanwhile, back in Medina, the Prophet was giving a sermon in the Mosque when he suddenly started informing people of the happenings in Mota. He told them about the bravery of Zaid and Abd Allah and how they fell fighting bravely. On account of Jaffer, he was detailing his combat against the Romans while God was having him watch the battlefield from hundreds of miles away. He exclaimed with pride how Jaffer was making his enemies route and how they were fleeing from the bold attacks of Jaffer, how Jaffer had dismounted from his horse like a ferocious lion readying to weigh his prey, how Jaffer had

hamstrung his steed to impress on his foes that he was either going to fight today or fall, how his sword was blazing through the legions of Romans as they were backing off in fear to avoid their certain death. But then he suddenly lamented how both arms of Jaffer were severed one after the other and how his live body was being lifted at the spears by a cohort of Romans. Jaffer soon succumbed to death with fifty wounds on his face and his entire body.

Muslim formations seeing the fall of their three commanders started to disintegrate but in the heat of the battle, Thabit b. Arqam stepped forward, holding the Muslim banner high rallying them around him until the day was over. The next day, the Muslims picked Khalid b. Waleed as their next commander. Khalid, now fearful of the determination of the Roman army and his neck next on the line, chose not to invite anymore pitched battles. He instead relied on hit and run skirmishes, keeping the Romans occupied until he decided to pull back and retreat towards Medina.¹²¹

Muhammad, in Medina, being fully aware of the situation on the battlefield immediately left for Jaffer's house to console his family. As he reached the door, he saw Jaffer's little son Abd Allah sitting in front, scattering his toys in the street playing with small clay objects.¹²² On the Prophet's asking, he innocently mentioned that he was a merchant who was selling his artifacts to other kids. The Holy Prophet tearfully hearing his adorable exposition lifted him, hugged him tightly, and supplicated for him to never experience a loss in his business. Decades later, he indeed turned out to be the wealthiest merchant of Arabia in his prime. The Holy Prophet consoled Jaffer's widow Asma of her honorable loss on the battlefield and asked Fatima to send food to her home for three consecutive

days. From then on, it became the Muslim tradition of sending food to the house of the deceased for three days after their loss.

Then the Prophet proceeded to Zaid's house. The prophet lifted and hugged his little daughter until they both sobbed together so much so that the Prophet's shirt was soaked with their tears. Then the Prophet went to the home of Abd Allah, consoling his family and giving the news of his high status in paradise.

Heaps of insults for the deserters

Both Jaffer and Zaid were among the first Muslims from the most trying days of Mecca. Jaffer, son of Abu Talib, was among the first protectors of the Holy Prophet along with his father and brothers. He was a born leader who was appointed the chief of Muslims in Abyssinia by the Prophet himself. Zaid, raised in the Prophet's household, had been with him through the thick and thins of Meccan and Medinite struggles, leading many scouting missions in defense of the state of Medina. Abd Allah was among those first Medinite Muslims who had personally braved through hostile Meccans to invite the Holy Prophet to their city, giving the guarantee of his safety. All three were veterans of Muhammad's most devoted circle who were completely aligned with the Holy Prophet's Mission and understood his Message well.

Khalid was, at best, a novice compared to them. Completely unaligned with the Prophet's Mission, he had accepted Islam only a few months before the Battle of Mota when he had seen Muhammad's fortunes flip upwards after the Treaty of Hodaybia. Before this, he had spent eight years fighting ardently against the Holy Prophet riding alongside the likes of Abu Sufyan, Abu Jahl, Ikrama, and his father, Waleed. His election

showed an utter lack of judgment on the part of those who had elected him only on the merit of his past battles. The Prophet's selection of commanders had taught them that the leadership was more about the character strength and the integrity of the person than his resume alone, a lesson obviously lost on those Muslims. Nevertheless, Khalid was elected in the chaos of the battle losses, and both he and his electors had a share in the ignoble retreat from the war.

As Khalid's army ventured close to the city, the people of Medina lined the streets throwing dust on their faces for their running away from the battlefield, yelling at them with comments like, "You runaways, you have fled from the enemies while fighting for the Lord."¹²³ On approaching their homes, some found their wives not opening the doors for them; others felt so embarrassed that for a long time, they had quit coming to the mosque for daily congregation prayers. It kept on happening until the Prophet forgave them for their fleeing, hoping that in the future, they may fare better.

Outcomes of the Battle of Mota

However inconclusive it was, the Battle of Mota established the Prophet's unflinching statesmanship over his enemies; they learned that the Prophet of God could be 'all mercy' but could also be 'all justice' when the circumstance called for it. From now on, they had to respect the considerations of the state of Medina just as they were used to for other neighboring states. It was also a clear proclamation to his friends and foes alike that to him, nothing was more important than his Mission ordained by his Lord. Not even his cousin Jaffer for whom only a few months ago, on the day of the conquest of Khyber, he had shown great endearment and deep affection; nor his adopted son Zaid who had been with him since the day one of his

Mission; nor his devout follower Abd Allah who had been his unwavering supporter before he even arrived in Medina. Those who aligned themselves with this way of thinking understood the rationale of the Prophet's grandson Husain, who half a century later, led his whole clan in the desert of Karbala in the jaws of certain death, with the ultimate goal of preserving the essence of his grandfather's Mission.¹²⁴ The Holy Prophet had trained his grandchildren well.

THE CONQUEST OF MECCA

Background of the March on Mecca

Banu Khuza'a and Banu Bakr ibn Manat used to be the old foes from the time before Islam. They both used to share adjacent wells and lands in the valleys surrounding Mecca. These overlaps used to cause frequent conflicts resulting in various homicides on both sides. After the Hodaybia treaty, Banu Khuza'a announced their alliance with the Holy Prophet. They were not new to this alliance though, a few years ago they had sent riders to Medina to forewarn Muslims of the movement of Abu Sufyan that ended in the Battle of Khandaq. Banu Bakr, on the other hand, chose Qureish, who they were allied with well before the treaty went in effect.

Breach of the Peace Treaty of Hodaybia

The year was 8 AH. The news of Khalid's spectacular rout at Mota was the latest buzz among Qureish. Only a year ago, Khalid was considered one of their most promising cavalry commanders leading their consecutive battles against Muhammad. Now his wholesome defeat after joining the Muslims was inducing many ideas in the always scheming warmongers. Perceiving Muhammad's weakness after the Battle of Mota, they were itching to test the waters in Medina. In this backdrop, their allies in Banu Bakr turned out to be the most suitable testing tools for such an adventure.

With weapons and commute supplied by the Qureish chiefs, Banu Bakr riders attacked Banu Khuza'a near a watering hole and killed over a dozen of their unarmed men. Banu Khuza'a, fearful of the complete annihilation of their clan, knowing the powerful Qureish chiefs backing their assailants, rushed forty

mounted men to Medina to invoke their alliance with the Holy Prophet. Amr, the leader of the Khuza'a delegation, met the Holy Prophet when the Prophet was attending the state affairs in the mosque and informed him of the ambush. The Prophet remained silent after hearing of the breach, but afterward, while performing the prayer ablutions, he was heard saying, "I shall not be assisted until I offer assistance to others."

Abu Sufyan heading to Medina for assessment

As this was unfolding near Mecca, the winters were approaching, and Abu Sufyan was conveniently in Syria with the trade expedition as his alibi. Syria, due to its harsh weather, didn't use to be a typical winter destination for Meccan caravans, though. Nevertheless, following the grieved party of Banu Khuza'a, Abu Sufyan also made arrangements for Medina to assess the situation there personally. For Abu Sufyan at the helm of Qureish, this was necessary since one of the Hodaybia terms had called for the ten years of uninterrupted peace, and any breach from any party was to make the treaty void.

Two years ago, when the treaty of Hodaybia was signed, Abu Sufyan was under the impression that Muhammad from the position of weakness had petitioned for it. Abu Sufyan had the upper hand back then, and the terms and the language of the treaty spoke of it. Even some of the Prophet's followers had the same view, predominantly Omar, who had made a huge show of it. The reason Abu Sufyan had agreed to the peace back then was that at that time, he didn't want bloodshed at the doorstep of Mecca immediately before the lucrative Hajj season. Back then, the Prophet demanding an oath of loyalty from his followers had given him just that impression, of possible and imminent bloodshed near Mecca.

Now two years later, in Medina, Abu Sufyan had to play his cards carefully. He would offer and get the treaty extended if Muslims were still considering themselves weak, in which case he could breach the peace at will just like this time it was done at the back of Banu Bakr. If the Prophet didn't agree to the peace extension, then this was exactly what Abu Sufyan wanted from the start. A longer-term peace was in favor of the Prophet's Mission. A constant state of war and fear favored those who wanted to sabotage the expansion of the Prophet's Mission.

Abu Sufyan returning empty-handed

What didn't cross his mind was the third option which God had planned for His religion, something which was not even a possibility in Abu Sufyan's calculations. After arriving in Medina, Abu Sufyan found himself dumbfounded by seeing the magnificence of the Islamic state the Holy Prophet had founded. He hadn't expected such an orderly state in Medina; neither had he expected such riches that resulted from this order. In between the episodes of peace and foreign-imposed wars, the Holy Prophet had managed to create an oasis of peace and tranquility in the middle of lawless Arabia. Abu Sufyan's shabby fiefdom in Mecca was no match to the grandeur of the Medinite Kingdom of God.

Observing the grandeur of the state of Medina up close, Abu Sufyan forgot all his composure as the grand-chief of Mecca. He directly headed to the apartment of his daughter, who happened to be the wife of the Holy Prophet. There he met his daughter Umm Habiba and after exchanging the customary greetings, proceeded to sit on a simple mat. Seeing this, Umm Habiba hastily blocked him and quickly folded the mat away. She then offered him to sit on the bare floor. Upon inquiring of

such treatment, she replied that he contaminated with the filth of false gods was unfit to sit on the hallowed mat of the immaculate Prophet. He had come here to seek the mediation of his daughter with the Holy Prophet, receiving this kind of welcome he quickly got up and left her house cursing loudly.

He then met Ali and Abu Bakr to seek their intervention to reach the Holy Prophet. They refused any assistance. He then went on to seek the intercession of Fatima, the beloved daughter of the Holy Prophet, who had a reputation of never refusing a needy from her door.¹²⁵ She said she could never offer more than what her father could offer to anybody. Desperate for reconciliation now, he begged her to allow her son Hassan to mediate for him. Hassan was only six years old at the time, but Abu Sufyan had heard of the institution of Ahlulbayt the Prophet had established in his first year in Medina, and he was smart enough to know the channels through which he could best approach the Holy Prophet. But he was told, how come the young Hassan could promise something that his grandfather wasn't willing to offer.

Rejected from all sides, he met Ali again. Ali told him flatly that nobody could do anything for him without the consent of the Holy Prophet. The most he could do was to proclaim his desire for the continuation of his friendship with the state of Medina and his request for his own protection as the chief of Mecca. He went to the courtyard of the mosque and loudly announced what Ali had suggested. When back in Mecca, he was ridiculed for his naivety on following Ali's suggestion. Without him realizing, Ali had made him announce Qureish weakness to every citizen of Medina.

The Prophet's secret preparations for Mecca

Such was the alignment of Ali with the Prophet's Mission. On Ali's insinuation, Abu Sufyan had loudly and clearly declared the weak hand of Qureish in front of everybody, in his very own words. His admission made the job of the Holy Prophet easy in rallying Muslims around him for taking the city of Mecca back from the pagans. The Holy Prophet, who would not tolerate bloodshed anywhere, could definitely not tolerate it in Mecca; the first sanctuary God had declared on the earth for the humankind. The extreme secrecy was the only way the Holy Prophet could ensure the least violence during the campaign.

As the past eight years had shown, pagans of Qureish were trigger happy to the point of stupidity, waging one losing battle after another. Abu Sufyan and others, who were considered political geniuses among their admirers, were proving to be the people of below-average wit. Only a few weeks ago, the pagan leaders had overplayed their hand sabotaging the peace deal with the Holy Prophet, and now Abu Sufyan forgetting all of his grand designs in Medina had declared his weakness in front of the whole city. The Holy Prophet had to save Meccans from further self-destruction.

Only the Prophet, his Ahlulbayt, and a few trusted followers knew of his plans. There was an absolute curfew imposed on the travel to Mecca. All routes from Medina to Mecca were blocked off. No further interaction was allowed with the pagan Bedouin tribes around Mecca. Soon after these measures were put in place, the Holy Prophet summoned the chiefs of the Muslim tribes, informing them to make preparations for an upcoming expedition. He ordered these chiefs to observe complete secrecy. To create the diversion, he even sent one of his followers towards a random town far away from Mecca. As

these preparations were going on, Abu Bakr visited Ayesha and probed her on the next destination of the Holy Prophet. She swore total ignorance. Abu Bakr returned without any new information on the expedition.

Even with this much discretion, the plan was somehow leaked to one of the Muhajirun, who managed to mail a warning letter to the Meccans. The Holy Prophet immediately sent Ali, Ammar, Zubair, and a few other trusted men behind a certain woman named Sara. She was a famous singer of Mecca and had been visiting various cities for her concerts. Although she couldn't find many audiences in Medina, she managed to meet this certain Muhajir who gave her the letter to deliver. She kept denying the letter to the point others were convinced of her veracity. Ali, however, having faith that the Holy Prophet won't mention anything without the divine guidance, took his sword out pledging to execute her if no letter was produced. Seeing Ali's seriousness, she reached in her headdress and revealed a thin parchment intertwined in her locks. The letter said, "Habib b. Balta'a to the Meccans, Health! The messenger of God is preparing to attack you secretly. War!"¹²⁶

Habib, a veteran of the Badr, was soon brought in front of the Holy Prophet. Omar jumped up with the drawn-out sword asking the Prophet's permission to kill him. Omar so far had not bagged one trophy in any of the wars waged on Medina but was always found eager to kill the prisoners who couldn't defend themselves. The Holy Prophet ignored Omar's executioner proclivity and asked Habib of the reason for such a grave violation. Habib, now crying out of embarrassment, informed the Prophet that his family had no protection back in Mecca, and by this favor, he was hoping to secure a Meccan chief to protect his family. Seeing him repentant, the Holy Prophet

pardoned him for his offense but also relayed a warning from God to not repeat this mistake for all others present at the occasion.¹²⁷

The March begins

The month of Ramadan 8 AH, had begun, and Muslims were in the state of fasting when the Holy Prophet ordered all adult Muslim men from Medina to ride with him towards Mecca. A few miles out of Medina, he asked for a cup of water, breaking his fast, making it 'Qasr' in front of everybody, defining the rules of fasting for a traveler while declaring that anybody who disagreed with him in this was disobedient to him. He also called for the chiefs of the Muslim tribes to start their march and meet him near Mecca.

Halfway towards Mecca, near the town of Jehfa, he found his uncle Abbas migrating towards Medina along with his family. The Prophet let his family continue towards Medina and had Abbas accompany him. Abbas had also brought with him two cousins of the Holy Prophet, who were pardoned on the intervention of the Prophet's most distinguished wife, Umm Salama, who was also with him in this journey. One was Abu Sufyan bin Harith, not to be confused with Abu Sufyan b. Harb, the leader of Mecca, and the other was Abd Allah, the brother of Umm Salama. By now, over ten thousand men were riding with the Holy Prophet. Omar was also somewhere in this army, witnessing from his own eyes the fruits of the wisdom of the Holy Prophet for the Peace treaty of Hodaybia that he had so passionately opposed. Two years ago, the Prophet had fourteen hundred of his followers under the tree pledging their support in Hodaybia. Today five times more were marching towards Mecca with the main banner of the army in the hands of Ali and the Prophet surrounded by his most devout followers.

Looking at the size of the Prophet's army, unaware of the real plans of the Holy Prophet, and mindful of the mule-headedness of the leaders of Qureish, Abbas reckoned that had this army was provoked to unleash on Mecca, none of the warring inhabitants of Mecca would live to see the next day. With the Prophet's consent, he rode on Prophet's white mule towards Mecca, hoping to find someone to warn Meccans of the coming danger and to encourage them to make peace with the Holy Prophet before he would order their doom. It was approximately the eighth day of the march towards Mecca when the Holy Prophet reached an area called Marr az-Zahran. He was still ten miles away from the city limits. The night was settling in, here for the first time the Prophet allowed his men to light fires at night to make their presence known.

Abbas meanwhile reached the outskirts of Mecca in the darkness of the night found three men walking towards him while chatting with each other. It turned out; it was Abu Sufyan bin Harb, the chief of Mecca, along with two of his men trying to figure out the reason for these fires around Mecca. Someone said it was the tribe of Banu Khuza'a on which Abu Sufyan replied the tribe was too small to light these many fires. Abbas recognizing Abu Sufyan's voice announced that it was the army of the Prophet of God, ten thousand strong, coming to take over Mecca in the morning.

Abu Sufyan couldn't beat Muslims, so he joined them

Abu Sufyan already humbled, seeing this spectacular show of force couldn't believe for a moment what he just heard. The spontaneous words that came out of his mouth were, "What hope is left now?" Abbas advised to mount with him on the mule and hurry in the presence of the Holy Prophet to secure his guarantee of safety for himself and the city. Abu Sufyan

agreed, and they both soon reached the camps of the Holy Prophet. As Abbas passed between the tents, people let Abu Sufyan proceed, knowing he was with Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet. But as they passed by Omar's tent, he drew his sword and ran after them until they reached next to the tent of the Holy Prophet. Omar seeing Abu Sufyan completely defenseless, demanded in excitement to kill him right then and there, while he was between them. Disregarding Omar's enthusiasm, the Holy Prophet allowed Abu Sufyan to stay overnight with Abbas and ordered him to present himself in the morning.¹²⁸

The next morning Abbas brought Abu Sufyan to the Prophet's tent. The Holy Prophet asked him whether he believed in one God now and was ready to shun his human-made deities. Abu Sufyan replied that he believed this now since those idols never came to his rescue in Badr and Uhud, but arrogantly declared that he still had doubts of Muhammad, as the Prophet of God. On Abbas's grilling, he soon came to his deceitful self, fearful of his life thinking that being stubborn now could cost him his dear life, announced to everybody that for now, he believed in Muhammad as the Prophet of God. The Holy Prophet gladly accepted his faith because at least this was what he had on his lips. The Prophet then announced among his followers that as they entered Mecca, whoever took refuge near Ka'ba was to be in peace, whoever stayed in his home would be left alone, and whoever gathered in the house of Abu Sufyan would be spared.

The Prophet entering the City of Mecca

Soon Bilal called the Adhan for the morning prayers. Abbas took Abu Sufyan to show the ritual ablution before prayers. There he observed the Holy Prophet performing the ablution and watched the people collecting the sacred water flowing from the arms of the Holy Prophet, applying it on their hands and

faces for blessings. Abu Sufyan enviously mentioned to Abbas that he had never seen the emperors of the world's dynasties receiving such veneration from their people. Leaving Abu Sufyan to his sulking, Abbas went on to perform the morning prayers behind the Holy Prophet. Soon after the morning prayers ended, the mighty army received orders to march towards Mecca.

On the passing of each battle group, Abu Sufyan thought it was the core battle group of the Holy Prophet. Until a regiment of Ansaar passed by covered with full-body armor from head to toe, with Sa'd bin Abadah heading the group. Seeing Abu Sufyan watching, he came close to him, threatening that today would be the day of revenge for all the killings he had been perpetrating against Muslims. On hearing this, the Holy Prophet politely relegated Sa'd from his command. Aggression and violence was neither the method nor the goal of the Holy Prophet.¹²⁹

Abu Sufyan, who was taken aback at the mightiness of the Prophet's army, foolishly revealed his mindset to Abbas by saying, "Your nephew has indeed become such a mighty king," on which Abbas chided him by saying, "Instead he is a great Prophet of God." The same language was used half a century later by Abu Sufyan's grandson Yazid when he told the chained children of the Holy Prophet in the court of Damascus, "Banu Hashim had staged a play to get a kingdom. There neither was news from the skies nor came down any revelations."¹³⁰

Abu Sufyan was let go to inform Meccans of the incoming army and the sanctuaries the Holy Prophet had assigned for them, one including his own house. Hind, his wife adamant in her old ways, cursed him on changing the sides on the first whiff of the

danger. He, in turn, informed her that he had seen such magnificence in Muhammad, that soon the empires of Rome and Persia and the kings of Himyar and Kindah would be turning to Islam.

Muhammad dividing Meccans into three groups

Soon the city of Mecca was divided into three groups. The first group was of those who, after the Peace Treaty of Hodaybia, had secretly converted to the new faith but were unable to declare it, either due to the fear of persecution or due to the terms of the treaty which prohibited the poor dependents from leaving the city. Hearing their Prophet's approaching and their kindred in faith entering Mecca in droves, many of these hidden Muslims quickly gathered around Ka'ba, cheering the incoming troops. The second group was of those, the 'silent majority' whose motto was, 'we were neither with this side nor the other', they chose to wait it out in their homes, conveniently showing their impartiality by closing their doors. The third group, which had squarely been in the camp of Umayyads and had no desire to leave it, quickly assembled in Abu Sufyan's home to wait for further instructions.

With his proclamation, the Holy Prophet had prophesized the three major leanings in his nation for all times to come. From now on, there would be those who would faithfully believe in the veracity of the Prophet's Mission and strive and bleed for its success, making Ka'ba their nucleus. Then there would be those who would always opt to sit in their homes whenever a crisis would appear, willfully unwilling to pick sides. Then there would be those who, even though claiming to be Muslims, would always prefer to attach themselves to the house of Abu Sufyan and the likes.

Fifty years down, when the time came to preserve the essence of the Holy Prophet's Mission, his grandson Husain first headed to Ka'ba to invite masses to his revolution. Except for a handful, the majority closed their doors on him remaining aloof to the moral crisis brewing around them. Still yet, many picked the house of Abu Sufyan as their guide, eventually taking part in the massacre of the progeny of the Prophet of Islam in Karbala.

The Holy Prophet declaring the General Amnesty

The Muslim regiments entered the city from four roads, the Prophet entered last with his head bowed down with gratification, his shoulders lowered in reverence, and his lips were repeating the praises of his Lord. He first went to the Ka'ba, where he completed the seven rounds around it and then proceeded to complete his prayers. Soon afterward, he appeared in front of the haughty chiefs of Mecca, the vicious bullies standing there expecting severe retribution for their endless crimes of the past.

On seeing their anxiety, the Holy Prophet asked them, "What are you expecting of me?" "Mercy," that's all they could mutter standing there in disbelief on the sudden downfall of their fortunes. Indeed this moment had come upon them completely unexpected, as just until this morning, there was no match to their arrogance and hubris against the weak. The Holy Prophet replied, "Today, I'll speak to you like the Prophet Joseph spoke to his brothers. There is no chastisement for anyone today. May God Almighty forgive you too, He is all Merciful, all Loving. Go on now! You all are free."¹³¹

There were eleven men and six women who were excluded from this amnesty. These were the worst enemies of his Mission, the men, and women of extreme hatred towards their

fellow human beings who had committed the worst crimes even to the standards of the violent Arabian society. Even from them, only eight were put to death, the remaining secured pardon from the Holy Prophet imploring his magnanimity and his merciful nature. Hind, the antagonist wife of Abu Sufyan, who had chewed on the liver of Hamza in the chaos of the Battle of Uhud, was pardoned too.

Muhammad and Ali cleansing Ka'ba of the idols

Within a day of the prophet's entry into Mecca, the entire city was purged of any violence. On Hind's instigation, Ikrama b. Abu Jahl mounted a halfhearted resistance, but it was quickly put down. Some twenty or so Meccans had died in this futile show of force. Soon after, the Holy Prophet visited the Ka'ba to cleanse it from the idols that had been planted there for the past hundreds of years. Some were even implanted in the inner and outer walls of Ka'ba and were pulled out and destroyed. Some were placed on the top and around Ka'ba and were pulled down and smashed. Hobal, the main idol was placed up high on a place of prominence which the Prophet couldn't reach, he asked Ali to mount on his shoulders and push the idol away from Ka'ba into the ground. Ali smashed Hobal placing his feet on the Prophet's shoulders. Meccans who had accepted the new faith were ordered to smash the idols in their homes and around the city. A few were sent to the suburbs of Mecca to do the same.

THE BATTLE OF HUNAYN

During the Prophet's brief stay in Mecca, the newly converted Meccans came to pay personal allegiance to the Holy Prophet. On the day of the allegiance, first came the men putting their right hands in the hand of the Holy Prophet one by one pledging their faithfulness to their new leader. Then came the women, they tapped on the piece of the fabric draped over the Prophet's right hand. For some larger clans, their chiefs came to pay allegiance on their behalf. The whole day was spent in this important exercise. The tribe of Banu Jazhima, who had settlements outside Mecca and had converted some time back, couldn't approach the Holy Prophet that day. The Prophet decided to send someone to inform them of his arrival in Mecca.

Background of the Battle of Hunayn

Khalid was dispatched to Banu Jazhima settlement to let them know of the Holy Prophet's presence in the city. Khalid, who hadn't still completely aligned himself with the Mission of the Holy Prophet, found this as an opportunity to settle his old scores with Banu Jazhima. In the years past, one of his relatives was murdered by some raiding parties of Banu Jazhima. Khalid hadn't forgotten this and apparently hadn't learned anything from the general amnesty of the Holy Prophet. He, on approaching their settlement, cunningly had Banu Jazhima scouts remove their arms only to attack them afterward, killing all of them. Khalid's transgression deeply offended the Holy Prophet. He immediately sent Ali to handle the crisis in his personal care. Ali explained Khalid's background to Banu Jazhima requesting to accept the compensation for the innocent blood spilled by him. Seeing the successor of the Holy

Prophet, himself asking for the pardon of the crimes of Khalid, they accepted the compensation deal. They obviously were surprised to see the mighty general of the Prophet's occupying army seeking their approval for the compensation while also seeking their forgiveness for the crime of one of his subordinates. These high morals were unheard of in the belligerent culture of Arabia, where the powerful never cared for the sensitivities of the weak.

After their agreement, Ali instantly started paying the compensation amount to the beneficiaries. After satisfying the aggrieved family members of Banu Jazhima, he continued distributing the remaining treasure among the other members of the maltreated tribesmen, which he had brought along with him. The Holy Prophet commended Ali's prudence in handling the thorny fallout, but the ill will Khalid had created soon came haunting the Muslims.

Residents of Ta'if itching for war

The powerful tribes of the neighboring city of Ta'if, namely the Banu Hawazin and the Banu Thaqif had been carefully watching these new developments in Arabia. They had heard of the breach of the Hodaybia treaty by the haughty Meccans and knew that the fall of Mecca was the consequence of their own misadventures. Their spies had informed them of the Prophet's march on Mecca, and they were aware of the strength of the army the Prophet had brought with him. While the past crimes of the Meccans were not deserving of it, the details of the merciful amnesty of the Holy Prophet had reached them as well. Compared to the Muslims, they had in their possession a larger and much stronger force to protect their city with, but until a day before, they had no intention to confront Muslims in open war. But Khalid's uncalled for aggression against Banu Jazhima

had changed their thinking. They viewed Khalid's malicious strike on an unsuspecting clan as the official policy of the Muslims going forward.

They had the backing of all of the mountain tribes of the region and were outnumbering Muslims four to one. These mountain tribes were experts at guerrilla warfare and knew well how to use irregular terrain to their advantage. They also knew that the Prophet had left Medina with only ten thousand of his followers and was still consolidating his authority in the newly conquered Mecca. Knowing the age-old animosity of Meccans with the Muslims, they were not anticipating many Meccans to join the Holy Prophet in this new war. To not become a victim of a surprise attack like Banu Jazhima, the Ta'if residents decided to strike the Muslims near Mecca preemptively.

The Holy Prophet leaving Mecca

The Prophet heard of their movement when they were camping in the valley of Awtas, about halfway between Mecca and Ta'if. It had barely been two weeks of the conquest of Mecca. Mecca was conquered on the 20th of Ramadan, and the Holy Prophet was setting out to confront the Ta'if army on the 6th of Shawwal of 8 AH.

A young warrior named Malik bin Awf was leading the Ta'if force. They were correct in at least one of their calculations; the Prophet could only muster two thousand Meccans to aid in this war. The combined size of the Muslim army was twelve thousand strong now. Ali, as usual, was the standard-bearer of the Muslim army. It was by far the largest force the Holy Prophet had fielded against an aggressor. On seeing the numerical size of the Muslim army, Abu Bakr, shouted out boasting about its strength. The revelation from God

immediately admonished him.¹³² By the night time, the Muslim army reached near a valley called Hunayn. So far, they had only traveled one fourth the distance towards Ta'if. To their utter surprise, the forward force of the invading army of Ta'if was already camped on the other side of the valley; there was a narrow mountain pass separating the two. Had the Holy Prophet waited only a day more, he would be defending the sacred boundary of Mecca against these aggressors.

The first encounter

On the morning of the 10th of Shawwal, the Muslim army made their advance towards the valley of Hunayn. Feeling guilty at his previous aggression against Banu Jazhima, Khalid insisted on leading the first battalion towards the battlefield. The remaining battalions followed.

Malik, the general of Ta'if army, had overnight stationed expert archers on the narrow passage entering the valley of Hunayn. He also had hidden smaller teams behind the rocks and ridges of the valley to engage Muslims one-on-one during their advance. Khalid, who years ago had suffered a similar fate at the hands of the Muslims in Uhud, was soon becoming the victim of another such attack. Years before, he got lucky because the Muslims had abandoned their posts, defying the orders of the Holy Prophet. This time it was different. As soon as he and his battalion reached firmly between the tight mountain pass, a surprise shower of rocks and arrows descended upon them. Rather than swiftly charging ahead into the vastness of the Hunayn valley and confronting the enemy head-on, Khalid instinctively ordered a retreat. His miscalculation created a domino of chaotic fallback, as his battalion caused the battalion behind it to retreat, forcing the next one to run away until most of the Muslim army had fled the passageway. Abu Sufyan b.

Harb seeing the route of the Muslim army quipped, “today they won’t stop until they reach the ocean,” Safwan’s brother Jabla joyously yelled, “the magic of Muhammad is broken finally,” Sheiba, son of Othman, seeing the route drew out his sword saying, “now is the time to kill Muhammad.”

Banu Hashim left protecting the Holy Prophet

The Muslim rout was so thorough that only nine warriors from the Banu Hashim clan remained with the Holy Prophet. Ali, the standard-bearer, was on the Prophet’s front, defending the Holy Prophet from the hail of arrows and the rocks. Abbas and his son Fazl were on both sides of the Prophet stopping the ever-increasing enemy assaults. Abu Sufyan b. Harith, the Prophet’s cousin who had recently converted during the Prophet’s march to Mecca, was on the side of the Prophet fighting valiantly with his face covered with armor. The Prophet asked who he was on which he took off his helmet, kissing the Prophet’s feet in the saddle, asking for the Prophet’s pardon for his years of animosity. The Holy Prophet accepted his apology and prayed for his forgiveness. His brother Rabi’ah bin Harith was behind the Prophet defending him from the enemies’ assaults from the rear. Another of their brothers, Nawfal, soon joined them. Few other Banu Hashim youth separated themselves from the fleeing Muslim ranks, and quickly assembled around the Holy Prophet, protecting him from, now an open assault of the enemy. Abd Allah bin Zubair climbing down from his horse with a long sword in his hand charged ferociously towards a group of enemies attempting to encircle the Holy Prophet. Utbah and Uteibah, the two sons of Abu Lahab, who in the past had divorced the Prophet’s surrogate daughters on the persuasion of their mother, were fighting in unison with their spears crushing the skulls of the enemies. The tenth was Ayman b. Ubayd, who kept protecting the Holy Prophet with his spear

until he succumbed to the battle wounds and lost his life. He was not from the Banu Hashim but had been in service of the Holy Prophet throughout his life. The Prophet's life was never in such great danger as it was on the day of Hunayn.

Banu Hashim snatching back the victory

Abbas had a loud voice. On seeing the fleeing Muslims not paying heed to the Prophet's calls, he climbed a high rock and started shaming them, reminding them of their pledge of Bayt Ridhwan, of their battles of Badr and Khyber, of their unwavering support in Medina and so on. He yelled at them, asking them where were they running to while the Prophet of God was here standing between his faithful followers. At last, some of them turned back after hearing that the Holy Prophet was still standing tall between the braves of Banu Hashim. First, a few hundred men from the Ansaar returned, quickly running by the Holy Prophet without greeting him. The Prophet asked Abbas of which battalion was it, on which he replied that they were from Ansaar hiding their faces with their shields out of shame. Taking a cue from the Hashemite warriors, they jumped directly into the heat of the battle. Now the Banu Hawazin soldiers had to shift their war posture to defend against the wave of hundreds of Muslims attacking them from all sides. Since many of them had left their assigned posts on seeing the fleeing Muslims, their original tactic of typical mountain warfare fell flat. Soon the remaining Muslims returned, coming back to the battlefield with the same speed they had run away from it, sealing the fate of Ta'if forces. Their scattered and exposed formations couldn't sustain the wave after wave of Muslims returning to the battlefield. The Battle of Hunayn was soon over. They retreated towards their logistics base in the valley of Awtas.

About seventy of the most elite warriors of Ta'if fell that day; over forty were the victims of Ali's sword alone. The Holy Prophet quickly called in the heavy cavalry putting them under the command of Abu Amir Ash'ari to chase after the Ta'if army in the valley of Awtas. Here at their base camp, they had been accompanying their wives and children along with their livestock and their wealth. Malik's idea was that by having all this, the Ta'if forces would fight with all their zeal and would never turn their back in the war. But his plan failed miserably; they could not match the determination of the Muslim cavalry who kept them engaged until the final victory. Abu Amir eventually fell at the hands of the Awtas defenders, his cousin Abu Moosa took over the command of the cavalry, and finally managed to subdue the Ta'if army. End of the day, the mighty invaders of Ta'if either were captured or were forced to retreat towards the safety of their fortresses in Ta'if.

The non-violent siege of Ta'if

As soon as the cavalry returned, the Holy Prophet ordered Muslims to march towards the city of Ta'if. The residents of Ta'if had already prepared for such a scenario and were well supplied for a prolonged encampment. The Prophet stayed in the outskirts of Ta'if for twenty days, but seeing the siege was not yielding any results ordered to lift the siege and return to Mecca. During this time, the Holy Prophet did not make any attempts on the fortresses of Ta'if. The Prophet wanted to resolve the Ta'if matter with the least violence, but many among Muslims didn't like the idea and asked the Holy Prophet to let them advance on the Ta'if city for one last time. The Prophet advised against it, but some prominent Muslims kept pushing. Finally, the next day, they made a general assault on Ta'if, which ended in another stalemate. But in this assault, Abu Bakr's son got such an injury that he expired due to it sometime

later, while Abu Sufyan bin Harb lost one of his eyes from a random arrow. Muslims retired back to Mecca the same day, but before that, they didn't forget to demand their share of the spoils of Hunayn and Awtas.

The Holy Prophet divided the spoils among the Muslims according to their war efforts, but from his own share, he awarded a whole lot extra to Abu Sufyan bin Harb, Ikrama, and few others from Mecca, who had been his Mission's worst enemies in prior years. This over the board generosity created some discontent among the Medinite Muslims who thought the Holy Prophet preferred his Meccan relatives over them. The Holy Prophet reassured Medinites that even though the Meccans were satiated with the worldly stuff, they had with them the Holy Prophet in his life and his death.

During these hours, an older woman from the Ta'if suburbs of Banu Sa'd approached the Holy Prophet claiming she was the foster sister of him. Recognizing her, Muhammad spread his own mantle on the floor for her to sit on. He even asked her to come with him to Medina, but she preferred to stay with her people. Capitalizing on this newfound relationship, the captured tribesmen of Ta'if came imploring to release their war captives for the sake of that lady. The Holy Prophet readily agreed, and the war prisoners were gladly handed over to Ta'if to reunite with their families.

Banu Hawazin's chief Malik b. Awf who had holed himself up in the city of Ta'if and was not showing any signs of compromise even after the Prophet had lifted the siege asked the Holy Prophet to find some face-saving solution for him. So far, his stubbornness was stopping many common folks of Ta'if from accepting Islam. He petitioned to become a Muslim but to be

left to his own devices in the city of Ta'if while keeping his landholdings and wealth. The Holy Prophet recognized where his heart was, so he gladly agreed to his request. The Holy Prophet also reappointed him the chief of the city of Ta'if, along with showering him with lots of gifts from his own treasure. The issue of Ta'if resolved itself peacefully with the wisdom and generosity of the Holy Prophet, who kept it from turning into another unnecessary war.

The Holy Prophet soon returned to the city of Medina. There he received the news of the birth of his last son Ibrahim who later died in his infancy. The Prophet was saddened but was not disappointed. He had already firmly established the institution of the Ahlulbayt to continue his Mission and was not worried about its preservation at all. He kept on striving hard towards establishing Islamic morals among his people.

Gains of the Ta'if war

Surrender of Banu Hawazin had created the ripple effect of new conversions as people who were brainwashed for so long against the Holy Prophet experienced his generosity and compassion first hand and were astonished at the kind treatment they had received at the hands of the Muslims. Ta'if was one of the most affluent regions of Arabia, more so than Khyber due to its proximity to Mecca. The Holy Prophet, even though having absolute control over the destiny of its people and the regions surrounded it, treated them with such mercy that soon many of them willingly turned towards Islam and later turned out to be among the most faithful supporters of the Holy Prophet.

People of Banu Thaqif who hadn't accepted Islam just yet and who were curators of the famous idol Al-Lat, the patron

goddess of the city of Ta'if, were watching their cousins with envy after their conversion to Islam. For the first time in their lives, they were seeing the high morals of their Muslim neighbors, their dealings between themselves, the love and mercy that they used to show each other, and the social justice that they were living in now. But the most appealing for them was of their inclusion in the universal brotherhood of Islam, where they were completely fearless of any individual harm in lawless Arabia.

It had already been a year since they had brought the Hunayn war on themselves. Eventually, they sent a deputation to the city of Medina to negotiate a settlement with the Holy Prophet. They were ready to embrace Islam, but they also wanted some concessions in continuing some of their pagan practices. They obviously didn't want their central religious role diminished in the city of Ta'if by virtue of the priesthood of their main idol. On Muhammad's urging, their tribal chiefs finally agreed to accept the new faith without any conditions. Abu Sufyan b. Harb, who had old friendships with the elites of Ta'if, was sent back with them to destroy their patron idol. With some commotion and a bit of unrest, the Al-Lat was destroyed, and the city of Ta'if was rid of the practices of idolatry for good.

Section XII: ARABIA, THE KINGDOM OF GOD

By now, the city-state of Medina had transformed into the official capital of the nation-state of Arabia. Islam as an ideology and as a way of life was introduced to every clan and every tribe of the Peninsula. There was no household left in Arabia where they didn't have the adherents of Islam present among them. The Prophet's Mission was entering a new phase where it was soon to become a global cause of humanity far exceeding any other revolution the world had ever experienced before.

THE EVERLASTING PEACE WITH CHRISTIANS

Islam was not a hidden development contained only in the borders of the Arabian Peninsula. Due to the Prophet's determination in propagating it and his enemies' equal zeal to oppose it, the word of his Message had spread far and wide, in kingdoms and governorates around Arabia. Conquest of the lands and the peoples was never the goal or the purpose of the Prophet's Mission. He had come to teach humanity the submission of their hearts in the grace of their Lord. Those who were the scholars of the earlier Holy Scriptures and knew the workings of the prophets of the past knew that soon, this new monotheistic faith would be enveloping all peoples and all races of the world.

The monks of Saint Catherine's Monastery in Medina

With this thought in mind, a delegation of the monks of Saint Catherine's Monastery visited the Holy Prophet in Medina to discuss the status of Christians in the Islamic lands. The delegation had come from the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt in a time when nobody could predict if Islam would ever arrive in that region. Although some Christians of Yemen were among the earliest converts to Islam from the Prophet's earlier life in Mecca, Christianity was by and large an unknown faith in the city of Medina. Their discourse with the Holy Prophet ended in securing a charter for the rights of Christian citizens in Islamic lands until the last day of humanity on this planet earth. This was similar to the Charter of Medina, which the Holy Prophet had enacted between the Muslims and the adherents of other religions that included Pagans and Jews soon after he had adopted Medina as his new home.

Salient features of the Charter of Peace

The charter awarded the Christian citizens of all denominations, current, and future, various noble privileges and protections unheard of for even other Christian denominations living in Eastern Orthodox-dominated Byzantine. The Holy Prophet made the Charter with Christians binding on the future generation of Muslims until ‘the Day of the Resurrection and end of the World’.¹³³

The Charter started with the sentence, “This letter issued by Muhammad ibn Abd Allah, the Messenger of God directed to the embracers of Islam, as a covenant given to the followers of Jesus the Nazarene in the East and West, the far and near, the Arabs and foreigners, the known and the unknown.”

The terms of the treaty instructed Muslims to “never destroy or spoil any of the Christian churches, or other houses of worship, or take any of the things contained within these houses and bring it to the houses of Islam.” The treaty exempted Christian monks and religious figures from the religious taxes allowing them to pay whatever they found appropriate, ordering Muslims to not force the tax terms on them. The Charter also instructed Muslims to protect their Christians neighbors living in their towns and cities like their kindred. Also, no Christian citizen could be forced to enlist in any future armies of the Muslims; instead, the Holy Prophet ordered Muslims to ‘protect them and defend them against the others’.

The Holy Prophet himself gave the dictation while Ali was the Scribe of it.

EXPEDITION OF TABUK

Before the Holy Prophet, Arabia used to be a nonsignificant wasteland whose unsophisticated inhabitants used to be found bargaining in nominal markets of Syria and Yemen with their paltry trade items only to have vanished before the seasons turned to unbearable for the merchant caravans. After the Prophet's advent, Arabia became the land of the most fundamental transformations in the region. Within ten years of his Medina life, the Holy Prophet had unified most of the desert Arabia into one political entity even though the composition of the cities remained, by and large, the same, and the nomad tribes remained living in their traditional dwellings. The emergence of this new political entity was being noticed in Arabia's immediate neighborhood.

Background of the Expedition

The Byzantine Empire had recently come out victorious from a decade-long war with their Persian adversaries. Persian Empire was forced into an uncomfortable peace after almost knocking at the very gates of Constantinople, the modern-day Istanbul, which used to serve as the capital of the Byzantine Empire. Two regions, in particular, Mesopotamia and Levant, modern-day Iraq and Syria respectively, served as the border of the two competing empires, changing hands multiple times throughout the war. Both of these regions also happened to border the great Arabian Desert.

Syria, finally resting under the tutelage of the Byzantine emperor, was littered with multiple garrisons of the Byzantine army to facilitate the future aggressive moves of the empire. A forward-facing legion from one such garrison was found

advancing near the town of Balqa in the modern-day Jordan with Banu Ghassan and other Christian Arab tribes in the toe. A merchant caravan returning from Syria informed the Holy Prophet of the Roman movements.

The Holy Prophet immediately announced an instant expedition towards the border of Syria, summoning all Muslims tribes from the cities of Medina, Mecca, Ta'if, and the suburbs. It wasn't easy for the Prophet to gather a large fighting force in that time since the city of Medina and the neighboring areas were experiencing one of the worst droughts of the previous years, and the dates harvest season was fast approaching. Still, an army of the thirty thousand volunteers assembled on the outskirts of Medina.

The Prophet's march towards Syria

It was the month of Rajab of 9 AH. The Holy Prophet ordered the march as soon as he had his war provisions readied. The Prophet used to traverse obscure roads to hide his movements and to keep the element of surprise to his enemies. Due to the lack of rainfalls and occasional sandstorms, the expedition moved on, facing lots of hardships. At one point, the sandstorm was so severe that the Holy Prophet had ordered to tie the legs of the camels in small groups and to take cover behind them to protect themselves against the punishing winds. As they passed by the town of Al-Hijr, where an ancient people of Thamud had invited the wrath of God upon themselves by their corruption, the Holy Prophet ordered his men to move out fast from the area and camp in a place adjacent to it where they had no water wells close-by. An overnight rainfall soon remedied their provision problems. The next day the Prophet's army arrived in the town of Tabuk, where they learned from their scouts that

the advancing Roman legions had suddenly fizzled out, and the borders were again safe.

Ali was left in Medina to second the Holy Prophet

The Holy Prophet had made visible arrangements in leaving Ali behind in charge of his Ahlulbayt and the city of Medina before setting foot out of the town. The Prophet had told Ali, "It would be necessary that either I stay or you stay (in Medina)." ¹³⁴ Only Ali had the wisdom and the authority to stop the doings of the hypocrites who had stayed behind. The raiding gangs whose trade was to rob the towns and suburbs could only be stopped by the news of mighty Ali's presence in the city of Medina.

With the rapid conversions of the past few months, many of the new converts were either not ready for such an expedition or composed of those who had accepted Islam for the wrong reasons. Many of these were people of weak faith or dual loyalties; they hadn't expected a trial of faith so soon in their Islamic careers. On the Prophet's summoning, many of these had outright refused to accompany the Holy Prophet in this new expedition. Some among them even discouraged others, frightening them of the battle-tested Romans, predicting that all those accompanying the Holy Prophet would either be killed or be sold in slavery in the markets of Syria.

While this was happening, a house was discovered in Medina where the hypocrites used to meet to chart out ways to create dissension among Muslims and to manufacture the circumstances that invited non-Muslims to attack the city of Medina. The neighbors suspicious of the discreet activities complained to the Holy Prophet, prompting the Muslims to investigate the accusation. Once it became known that the antagonistic activities were for real, the house was ordered to

be burned down while such a meeting was in session, causing the conspirators to run for their lives and be apprehended by the awaiting Medinites.

The Holy Prophet needed his successor Ali to protect his capital in his absence, telling him that, "It would not be proper that I leave unless you are my successor."¹³⁵ While the Holy Prophet hadn't traveled far from Medina, Ali met him again, informing him of the machinations and the rumors of the hypocrites left behind in the city. The Holy Prophet immediately sent Ali back, reassuring him, "You are to me like Aaron was to Moses, except that there shall be no prophet after me."¹³⁶

The anger of the Prophet's followers

Many of his followers who had accompanied him in the greed of the war plunders were inflamed at the seemingly fruitless expedition. Being the part of a force of thirty thousand strong, with the Holy Prophet leading it, they must have hoped for violence and an eventual victory, resulting in some monetary payoff. The pain was doubled by the fact that they had left behind their date orchards, which were ready for the harvesting. Those who were doubtful about the Holy Prophet's Message were more vocal and were visibly angry. In this atmosphere, the Holy Prophet was ordered by God to gather his followers to seek their opinion on further advance. The Prophet presented the two options to his followers, either to continue their march into Syria or to return to Medina. Omar said that if the order of the advance was from God, then they were ready to move on. On which the Holy Prophet replied that had the marching orders came from God, he didn't need anybody's opinion. Omar must have forgotten again that the commandment of God guided the Holy Prophet's every move and every word and that the Prophet could not do anything

without God's permission. God had testified Himself in a revelation by saying, "Prophet does not digress, nor is he deceived, neither does he speak out of his own inclinations."¹³⁷ The Prophet then stayed for ten days in the suburbs of Tabuk eventually ordering a return to Medina.

Murder attempt on the Prophet's life

Ten people from the Banu Umayya and another few from the early converts of Islam hatched a plot to assassinate the Holy Prophet during this expedition. They planned to startle the Prophet's camel at night to have him fall from it to his demise or to mortally attack him in seclusion while he was away from his faithful followers. If exposed, they would claim it was for sports, and no real harm was intended.

It was the night time, and the Holy Prophet had taken a mountain pass on his way back from Tabuk. He was accompanied by two of his most trusted followers Ammar and Huzaifa. He was riding his camel next to a deep ditch. Ammar was holding the bridle while Huzaifa was walking a few steps behind with a stick in his hand. Suddenly they noticed a small party of camel riders fast approaching behind them. The Holy Prophet called out loud for them to identify; they remained quiet and kept riding. They could hear the clinking and clattering of the riders' weapons as they were rapidly heading in their direction. Ammar firmed his grasp on the bridle so as to keep the camel from bolting away, dropping the Holy Prophet. Meanwhile, the Prophet asked Huzaifa to scare the attackers' camels off. Huzaifa rushed back towards the invading party. He was yelling and waving his staff vigorously as he sped towards them. Spooked, their camels panicked, the perpetrators scattered off and rushed back down the valley, joining the rest of the soldiers in the Prophet's army. But Huzaifa had identified

them by the markings of their camels. The Prophet asked him to remain quiet about it since the Holy Prophet didn't want to demoralize his new converts due to the shameful involvement of his veteran followers. From now on, Huzaifa was called the 'keeper of the secret'.¹³⁸

The conclusion of the Tabuk expedition

While the Holy Prophet's huge army was stationed at the Syrian border, the neighboring tribal chiefs and the town heads came to meet the Holy Prophet. Many of them forged peace agreements with the Prophet; some agreed to pay the tribute money in return for the Prophet's protection of their hometowns against foreign aggression. Many people from the border areas accepted Islam by virtue of the Holy Prophet camping so close to them and the areas surrounding his camp experiencing miraculous happenings, blessings that had never been seen in that climate. After the Prophet's return to Medina, these and other delegations from various cities and tribes kept coming to meet the Holy Prophet, to pay homage to him, or to accept the new religion, to the extent that the whole year of 9 AH, became known as the 'Year of Delegations' among Arabs.

The powerful tribe of Banu Ghassan of the border area of Syria who had been traditional allies of the Romans and used to provide workforce and logistics to the Byzantine legions experienced the Prophet's power up close. Overawed, they halted their antagonizing activities against Muslims. Their informants also discouraged any potential Roman aggressions against the resourceful Muslims. Romans themselves, exhausted and depleted from their ten years of war with Persians, found a formidable force in Muslims better to be left unruffled. Soon after the Tabuk expedition, most of northern

Arabia accepted Islam just by experiencing the magnanimity of the Holy Prophet during his presence among them.

There was another benefit of the Tabuk expedition. The hypocrites who used to confess Islam from their tongues, but their actions were always against the Mission of the Holy Prophet, were openly acknowledged by the Muslims. Many of them had chosen to stay in Medina while the Holy Prophet was embarking on his last defense expedition towards the Syrian border. Many others came along with the Holy Prophet for various reasons, some even exposing their hatred by their attempt on the Holy Prophet's life during this expedition. After Tabuk journey, it became a known fact among Muslims that there were hypocrites among them, and that they came in all colors, shapes, and forms. They could be from the early Muslims, they could be from the new converts, from men or women, and could act on their evil designs in any situation, at peace or in war.

THE HYPOCRITES

It was not the Holy Prophet's habit to punish his followers for the crimes they hadn't committed. Even though he used to be informed of people's intentions through divine revelations, he never used to take action until a clear commandment ordered him to do something about them. God had revealed to the Prophet, a whole chapter about the hypocrites, and it was easy for everybody to identify them, probably not through their words but definitely through their actions.¹³⁹ Still, the Holy Prophet used to find excuses to grant them more time to rethink and repent.

Muhammad choosing not to punish the hypocrites

From the Holy Prophet's perspective, every soul counted, each one of them was free to choose their path, while he, his Ahlulbayt, and his divine book were there to assist them in getting back on the path of righteousness. For example, after the murder attempt at Tabuk, when Huzaifa suggested to the Prophet to punish those involved in the crime, the Holy Prophet said, "The people will say Muhammad having gained victories with their support is now going to kill them."¹⁴⁰

There was a case of one such Muslim who was involved in the assassination attempt during the Tabuk journey. He was later so remorseful that he used to ask the Prophet's forgiveness openly and used to find ways to atone for his moment of deviation. He used to supplicate to God to take his life in anonymity while fighting off the Prophet's enemies. His wish was granted as he was killed in an ambush soon afterward. His body was never found by Muslims to give it a proper burial. Muhammad himself prayed for his forgiveness.

Then there was Abd Allah b. Obay, a well-known hypocrite of Medina, who was ill since the Prophet's return from the Tabuk expedition. He eventually died due to his illness. His son, who was a devout Muslim, requested the Holy Prophet to take part in his burial. The Prophet agreed, even buried him in his own shirt on the request of his pious son. But as soon as the burial prayers ended, God revealed to the Holy Prophet to inform the Muslims that hypocrites, no matter how close in proximity they were to the Holy Prophet, will never be forgiven for their disbelief in God and His Messenger.¹⁴¹

For other hypocrites, the Holy Prophet, not revealing their names, had its far-reaching wisdom. There were many more besides the ones who had openly tried to harm the Holy Prophet. Punishing only a few of them would have allowed the remaining ones to claim that the Prophet had rid all of the hypocrites in his lifetime. Instead, the Holy Prophet made it the responsibility of the later generations of Muslims to recognize them through their actions and affiliations. Some revealed themselves immediately after the demise of the Prophet by attacking his Ahlulbayt and grabbing the privileges that they were not deserving of. Some others revealed themselves later by founding empires and waging aggressive wars on the neighboring kingdoms in complete disregard to the Mission of the Holy Prophet. The Chapter of Hypocrites, the 'Sura al-Munafiqun' was always there in Qur'an to reveal these hidden enemies' true colors.¹⁴²

Muhammad training Muslims not to be fooled

The destruction of their safe house had left hypocrites without a proper meeting place in Medina. Ali's presence in the city had stopped them from taking any revenge from the families of the Muslims accompanying the Holy Prophet towards Tabuk.

Exposed and likely under a constant watch of Ali, they had to find an alternative shelter soon while the Holy Prophet was away in Tabuk.

They found an empty piece of land on the outskirts of Qoba, not far from the original mosque in the city. There they hurriedly constructed a competing mosque in the few weeks that the Holy Prophet was out. Their pretext was that some old folks were finding it hard to reach to the daily prayers in the regular mosque of Qoba during the seasons of massive rains. Ali was aware of their schemes but chose not to disrupt them as he was short of Muslim manpower in protecting the city of Medina from any induced unrest. The day the Holy Prophet arrived back in Medina, the builders of the alternative mosque approached the Holy Prophet requesting his presence to inaugurate the mosque by performing some congregation prayers there.

The Prophet didn't answer them right away; instead, he waited for the signal from God.¹⁴³ Soon the Holy Prophet received a revelation denouncing the new mosque. He immediately ordered the demolition of the building, which was founded to create the discord among Muslims. The mosque was named Zirar in the divine revelation, and its destruction was a lesson to the Muslims not to be fooled by the deception of the evildoers even if they hide behind the holiest of their religious symbols. The remains of the destroyed house of sedition were left in its place for everybody to see and internalize the lesson.

Muslims, unfortunately, soon forgot the lessons of the mosque of Zirar. Years later, when Ali demoted Muawiyah b. Abu Sufyan from the governorship of Syria on the charges of moral and financial corruption, he rebelled and brought a large army to fight against Ali's authority. In one such battle, when his forces

were about to be devastated by the armies of Muslims, Muawiyah ordered his soldiers to raise the copies of the Qur'an on their spears. Seeing this, Muslims naively compelled Ali to halt the war, allowing the rebels to safely retreat to their borders in Syria only to wage their murderous strife another day. This rebellion eventually culminated in the rise of the Umayyad Empire, inflicting immeasurable setback to the Prophet's Mission.

FALSE ACCUSATIONS OF THE HYPOCRITES

During the days of the worst adversaries in Mecca, his enemies used to call him Al-Ameen and As-Sadiq, the most Trustworthy and the most Truthful. Neither in his birth nor his childhood, there was an event in which he could be found anywhere close to the abominations of the pagan lifestyle. As God himself testified, he was born in a family of Muslims who already had a firm belief in One God and testified the revelation of the previous prophets. In his adulthood, he was the noblest human Arabia had ever seen. Still, his enemies invented stories about him, hoping to dissuade humanity from his Message in order to push people away from his Mission.

The accusation that the Prophet could not read

One such accusation was that he couldn't read and write. They cooked this up to discredit the lofty Message of the Holy Prophet in the eyes of the learned people of Arabia. The pagans of Arabia were not a contributor to this rumor. Even the Jews and Christians didn't believe it. Instead, the biggest argument the Jews and Christians of Arabia had against the Prophet of Islam was that since his Message was so similar to the old scriptures, he must have read the old scriptures somewhere and was rebranding those in front of the pagans.

It was the Umayyads who concocted this story, who by force and bribes had taken over the reins of the Islamic lands and remained themselves installed on the neck of Muslims for the next ninety years. The Prophet of Islam was unschooled indeed, and God had testified to it in one of the revelations calling him the Unschooled Prophet, the 'Nabi al-Ummi'.¹⁴⁴ But unschooled didn't mean unable to read or write.

One small example was his dictating and then proofreading the terms of the Peace Treaty of Hodaybia, which was witnessed by fourteen hundred of his followers besides some Meccans. Another was his proofreading the collections of revelations that turned into the Holy book of Qur'an under his personal care. There was one such incident when a person he had employed to write down the revelations on his personal dictation wrote the twelfth Arabic letter of س, 'read as seen', without its grooves at the beginning of the letter. The scribe had written it without its grooves, which the Prophet corrected himself, making the grooves in the letter. This became a constant tradition for all of the future copies of the Qur'an handwritten or printed in later times.

Due to the Prophet's proofreading of the Holy Qur'an, he had earlier caught one scribe of the Qur'an, named Abd Allah b. Sa'd, who was in the habit of changing the words that the Holy Prophet used to dictate to him. He fled to Mecca upon being exposed and was among those eleven people who were ordered to be apprehended during the peaceful conquest of Mecca. He was the foster brother of Othman bin Affan who sheltered him in his house until the chaos of the conquest subsided only to produce him in front of the merciful Prophet to seek pardon for his crime. He was eventually released.

Accusations on the Prophet's propensity of Violence

Another false accusation that was neither spread by the pagans nor the warring enemies of the Holy Prophet during his lifetime was about his preference of violence as a tool to advance his holy Mission. After all, it was they who were bringing wars at the doorsteps of the Prophet. Even the Jewish tribes who had asked the Holy Prophet to deal with them according to their own scripture in the Constitution of Medina used to sing the

praise of his mercies when on two consecutive offenses of treason, they were let go free. It was due to their third consecutive offense of the same nature that they were punished accordingly.

The reality was that all of the wars, battles, or expeditions the Holy Prophet had undertaken were defensive. There was one phase of his life when the wars used to be fought near the city of Medina, where the Prophet had to defend his capital. In the next phase, the wars and battles were fought chasing the enemies away from the city of Medina. These wars were fought against those who used to incite sedition in the city of Medina or used to create insecurity in the suburbs.

In the last phase, there was one march that resulted in the conquest of Mecca without any bloodshed. There were other wars too after the conquest of Mecca where the enemies of his Mission came in large numbers only to create 'defense of Medina' like conditions on him which he preemptively stopped before they could ransack sanctuary cities of Muslims.

Rumors of the Prophet's propensity for violence and aggressive wars were coined in the time when Omar became the caliph, and the need arose to justify the land conquests of Persia, Syria, Egypt, and other regions around the Arabian Peninsula. In his reign, Omar had emboldened the hypocrites to the extent that Muawiyah, son Abu Sufyan was permanently installed as the governor of Syria on his wish. Before him, his brother Yazid b. Abu Sufyan was made the governor of Syria. Omar used to rotate all of his governors but never in his ten years of reign, replaced Banu Umayya from the seat of Damascus. Abu Sufyan and other Umayyads who were not deemed trustworthy enough to govern even the city of Mecca by the Holy Prophet

were left unchecked in the land of Syria to build an empire on the blood and treasure of sincere Muslims. After the conquest of Mecca, the Holy Prophet had appointed Uteb bin Usaid as the governor of Mecca, ignoring Abu Sufyan and the other leaders of Qureish.

Accusations regarding the Prophet's marriages

The third and one of the most vicious campaigns against the immaculate personality of the Holy Prophet was about his marriages. Among these, the two accusations were most often repeated, one of his multiple marriages and the other of his marriage with Ayesha, the daughter of Abu Bakr.

As far as his number of marriages, his enemies tended to portray the Holy Prophet as some sort of womanizer. What the accusers could never reconcile was the fact that in the prime of his youth, the Prophet never even married. It was the tradition of Arabs to marry in their late teens, yet the Holy Prophet was so consumed in his Mission that he had no time to spare for a wife, so he simply didn't marry. In his early twenties, when he finally did marry, he married Khadija, who was significantly older than him, and the marriage was by no means a fancy affair. It was a union of the two individuals deeply committed to the Mission of the Prophet, so much so that Khadija died in serving the Mission of her husband. He had spent twenty-five of his youth years with Khadija in a monogamous relationship.

When the Holy Prophet moved to Medina, he was already fifty-three years old. Here he married multiple women, each one divorced or widowed, mostly coming from backgrounds where they had no financial or social support after their previous husbands died in wars or left them for other reasons. Umm Salama, the most trusted wife of the Holy Prophet in Medina,

was one such woman. When her husband expired in the battle of Uhud, after the four-month waiting period, the Holy Prophet asked her hand in marriage. She was a cousin of the Holy Prophet and was one of the earliest converts of Islam. When the Prophet offered her to marry, she complained of her old age, and the reply she got from the Prophet was that he was afflicted with the same issue. She already had many children and told him that she didn't want to become a burden on the Prophet's finances bringing along the children from her deceased husband, the Prophet assuaged her by saying that this will make her family a part of his own family. Similar were the circumstances with the other wives of the Holy Prophet who the Prophet couldn't leave out exposed for maltreatment and exploitation in their old age.

Muhammad's marriage with Ayesha

The other accusation was of the age of Ayesha at her marriage with the Holy Prophet. The only accounts we have of Ayesha are either from the Qur'an, the word of God, or from her own descriptions. The sayings of the Holy Prophet are completely muted praising her. Qur'an has indeed mentioned her in multiple places, denouncing her one action or the other.

On one occasion, she was found bullying a wife of the Prophet, who was a converted daughter of a Jewish noble on account of her lineage. On this occasion, the Merciful God revealed, "Not let women ridicule other women; perhaps they may be better than them."¹⁴⁵ The Holy Prophet had told that wife to next time reply Ayesha in words like 'Moses is her father, Aaron is her uncle, and Muhammad is her husband'.¹⁴⁶ In the other two places, the divine revelations suggested to the Holy Prophet to divorce her for her musings.¹⁴⁷ On one occasion, she was called a person of 'twisted heart'.¹⁴⁸

In another place, she was falsely accused of an indecent act. The event was called the event of the False Accusation or 'Ifk' in the Qur'an.¹⁴⁹ The Holy Prophet had quit bringing her to out of town excursions after the event of Ifk, testifying to her gullibility, and remained separated from her for a month until the dust settled.

Her naivety and lack of her religious insight were further proved by her waging war against Ali years later, in defiance of the clear command of God to the wives of the Holy Prophet to 'remain in their homes in his absence'. She instead rode to Iraq to fight Ali. In one subsequent battle, she caused the death of about ten thousand Muslims in the first civil war she had instigated among Muslims.

With this kind of credibility, her claim of her age, or anything else, remained dubious at best. From her own words, she was the most beautiful, the most loved, and the youngest wife of the Holy Prophet, but the Prophet himself never backed this claim as it was not part of his decorum to discuss his wives out in the open. She obviously went overboard on account of her age in the zest of her competition with the other wives of the Holy Prophet, whom he gave more credibility due to their devotion to his Mission. Umm Salama was the foremost who he used to accompany in most of his expeditions. According to some researchers, who tried to determine her probable age through more authentic events in the Islamic history and the age of her siblings and peers, she was married somewhere in her seventeen or eighteen years of age and never gave birth to any of the children of the Holy Prophet.¹⁵⁰

Some hypocrites among Muslims gave her more eminence than she was entitled to due to her closeness with her father Abu Bakr, who had installed himself as the first caliph after the

death of the Prophet of Islam. Nonetheless, she was never divorced by the Holy Prophet, and for this reason alone, she was considered the 'mother of believers' and was entitled to the due respect of the Muslims.

THE FAREWELL PILGRIMAGE

In the 10 AH, the Holy Prophet had deputed Khalid to Yemen to preach and to invite people of Yemen to Islam. His mission was two folds, one to invite peaceful Yemenis to Islam and two to subdue the diehard haters who were only interested in spilling the blood of those who had accepted Islam among them. He proved to be an utter failure on both accounts. To those who he was supposed to teach Islam peacefully, he resorted to violence with them in the greed of winning war spoils from them, and to those he was supposed to quell, he came back running away from them.¹⁵¹ He was consequently called home due to his unneeded propensity to violence and his preference for winning the war booty instead of winning the hearts and minds of the Yemenis.

The Holy Prophet instead sent Ali to Yemen with the instructions that if through Ali's preaching, even if one person accepted Islam in the whole of Yemen, it would be better 'than any possessions the sun had shined upon'. Ali relayed Muhammad's Message to various tribes of Yemen. With Ali's persuasion, the tribe of Hamadan accepted Islam in one day. When the Holy Prophet asked Ali to relate his success in Yemen, Ali recounted that first, the people of Yemen came out against him in full armor ready to fight for their ancestral religion, but as previously directed by the Prophet, he addressed the mountains and the trees which responded to him sending salutations on the Holy Prophet through Ali.¹⁵² Yemenis laid down their arms, amazed at the miracle they had just seen at the hands of the successor of the Prophet. They asked Ali to educate them of the Message of the Prophet, which Ali did, explaining them the rationale of the Oneness of God and

presenting them with the beautiful articles of His religion to them. Soon many more tribes came in the fold of Islam with almost no violence at all. Ali kept the Holy Prophet informed of his progress during this successful campaign in Yemen, every time the news of the conversion of a new tribe came; the Prophet went in prostration thanking God for the success of his Mission at the hands of Ali. While Ali was busy promoting his Mission in Yemen, the Holy Prophet announced his plan for Hajj in Medina, ordering Ali to join him in Mecca.

Muhammad heading to Mecca for his pilgrimage

The Holy Prophet announced his intention of Hajj far and wide to invite as many followers as he could gather so as to teach various niceties of Hajj to them in its full details. Many of his followers arrived in Medina to observe the preparations of the Prophet and emulate his actions. They embarked on the journey in the last week of the month of Dhu al-Qidha, reaching a few miles out of the city of Medina towards the journey to Mecca in a station called Dhu al-Hulayfa. Here the Prophet performed ablutions and replaced his clothes with the two pieces of plain sheets, making his intention of donning Ihram, the 'pilgrimage garb'.

In this journey, along with his daughter Fatima and all of his wives, the Holy Prophet had more than a hundred thousand followers with him. This was in contrast to the thirty thousand men who had joined him only a few months ago in his expedition of Tabuk. Such was the wave of acceptance to Islam due to the peaceful preaching of the Prophet of Islam. The Holy Prophet had brought sixty-six camels with him for the ritual sacrifice of Hajj. The caravan reached the sacred boundary of Mecca on the 4th day of Dhu al-Hijjah, 10 AH.

Ali joined the Prophet in Mecca, returning from his successful trip to Yemen. The Prophet asked Ali of his preparations of Hajj, Ali replied, "I have taken upon me a vow to perform the same pilgrimage as the Prophet, and I've brought with me thirty-four camels for the sacrifice." The Prophet said: "In all the rituals of the Hajj and the sacrifice, Ali would be his partner."¹⁵³ Their combined sacrifice was a hundred camels, more than enough to feed the whole city of Mecca at the time. They entered the holy sanctuary from the gate of Bani Sheiba, the same gate the Prophet had entered in his youth more than two decades ago at the time of the rebuilding of Ka'ba. From there, they proceeded to circle the Ka'ba seven times, after which the Prophet prayed behind the place of Prophet Abraham moving on to the other rites of Hajj.

A few announcements of the Prophet during Hajj

After the remaining rites of the Hajj were completed, the Holy Prophet mounted his camel, announcing to the people that from now on, all of the bloodsheds from the state of ignorance were pardoned, essentially abolishing the age-old feuds between the families and clans. Then he continued reminding them of the sacredness of the four lunar months, the months of Rajab, Dhu al-Qidha, Dhu al-Hijjah, and the month of Muharram continuing the age-old prohibition of all kinds of violence in these months. The Holy Prophet proclaimed, "From now on, the Satan had forever despaired of idolatry in Arabia and was satisfied to be served in another way, so let all turn away from Satan and trust in One God." He then reminded people of their duties towards their wives, and to wives towards their husbands, forbidding husbands to hit their wives and commanding them to provide their wives with their necessities generously. The Holy Prophet decreed that as this day, this month, and this city was sacred for them, the "Lord of the

Section XII: ARABIA, THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Universe had also made their blood and their property sacred for each other too.” He then ordered them to relay these words to those who were not present at this moment.

APPOINTMENT OF THE PROPHET'S SUCCESSOR

On the 14th of the Dhu al-Hijjah, the Holy Prophet set out for the return journey to Medina. When he reached near the outskirts of the Jehfa valley, he abruptly stopped at a place that was not used as the resting place for the caravans traveling to and from Mecca. The reason for the abrupt halt was a revelation from God, the tone of which was different from the previous conveyances the Holy Prophet had received. The commandment ordered, "O' Messenger, announce - that which has been revealed to you from your Lord, and if you do not, then you have not conveyed His Message. And Allah will protect you from the people. Indeed, Allah does not guide the disbelieving nation."¹⁵⁴

The area where the Prophet had stopped was a dried-out pond of Khum, 'Ghadeer al-Khum' as it used to be called and was located next to a major trade route passing through the town of Rabigh. This ancient town was located at a major fork, where the caravans coming from the direction of Mecca used to split, some used to proceed to Medina, others used to carry on towards Syria along the coast of the Red Sea, while others used to head into the vastness of the Arabian Desert towards the small settlements of Najd and Al-Yamama. The divine selection of the place was due to its natural formation like an expanded bowl, appropriately elevated from its extremities, and slightly lowered at its center, making it easy for all to see and hear of the happenings at its center. The Holy Prophet dispatched the quickly assembled parties of mounted men to summon all those who had traveled on to various routes towards their native towns and tribes.

The Message was at the risk of being invalidated

The revelation not only made it obligatory on the Holy Prophet to announce that ‘which had been revealed’, but it had also put his entire Message at the risk of being invalidated. What was at stake was the entirety of the Qur’an up to the revelation of this most recent commandment. All of his efforts in bringing these revelations to his people, the wars he had fought, the family and friends he had lost, the traditions he had started, the customs he had erased; everything was at the brink of being undone had he not conveyed ‘which had been revealed’.

Muhammad’s life was in danger

The very life of the Holy Prophet was in grave danger after conveying this particular revelation. Even though here he was surrounded by a hundred thousand of his followers, all recently minted Hajjis, among them many veterans of Badr, Uhud, Khandaq, and Hunayn battles, yet the revelation informed him that, “Allah will protect you from the people.”

Also in the divine mention was a warning to those of his followers who would disbelieve in this particular revelation by saying that, “Allah does not guide the disbelieving nation,” regardless of how many times in a day they repeated the sixth verse of the first chapter of Qur’an, “Guide us to the straight path” in their daily prayers.

The declaration of Imamate

It was the 18th of Dhu al-Hijjah; four days had passed since the Prophet had left Mecca. The throngs of Muslims from various regions and tribes, all in huge anticipation of what was that for which thousands of them were pulled back to gather in this desert valley. It had taken Muhammad a few days to re-

congregate about one hundred thousand of the participants of this year's Hajj in this vast land of Khum.

At the daybreak, the Holy Prophet ordered his devout followers to erect a pulpit for him in the center of the huge crowd. They piled the saddles of the camels on top of each other, building a platform that could be visible from miles. Following the instructions of the Prophet, the pulpit was built high enough so the very last rows of the audience could view and hear from it and was short enough so the closest ones would not be deprived of the view. The top of the platform was flattened, so the Prophet could easily stand and walk on it. Bilal was ordered to call the people's attention towards the platform by calling Adhan. Soon everyone was looking towards the pulpit of the saddles. The camels carrying the family of the Prophet were huddled to one side from where their riders could clearly view the pulpit. His wives were peeping through the curtain covered wood chambers fastened on the sides of the camels.

As the Holy Prophet was walking uphill on the platform, he was firmly holding Ali's hand, tagging him closely behind. By now, there was pin-drop silence in the desert as everybody was watching this display with great suspense. As soon as the Prophet reached the top, he adjusted Ali's black headdress and pulled him next to his side just before starting his address. Ali's hand was still in the hand of the Holy Prophet.

Beginning with the name of God the Merciful, the Holy Prophet recounted the favors of God on him and his followers. He then continued by asking, "O people, Allah the Most Kind the Omniscient has told me that no apostle lives to more than half the age of him who had preceded him. I think I am about to be called, and thus, I must respond. I am responsible, and you are

responsible, then what do you say?" they all replied, "We witness that you have informed, advised, and striven, may Allah bless you."

He then asked them, "Do you not bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His servant and Apostle, and that His heaven is true, His hell is true, death is true, the resurrection after death is true, that there is no doubt that the day of judgment will come, and that Allah will resurrect the dead from their graves?" They all said, "Yes, we bear witness." He said, 'O Allah, bear witness.' Then he continued, "O people, Allah is my Lord, and I am the lord of the believers. I am dearer to the believers than their own lives" they all affirmed the Prophet's authority over them. Upon which the Holy Prophet raised Ali's hand high, proclaiming in a commanding voice, so all near and far could hear and see him loud and clear, "Of whomsoever, I am the master, Ali here is his master. O God, be a supporter of whoever supports him and be an enemy of whoever opposes him, and divert the truth towards Ali."¹⁵⁵

The Holy Prophet then repeated this three times, so there was no ambiguity left in anyone's mind in the crowd about the matter. He then continued, "I will ask you about the two weighty things that I have left for you. Each of which surpasses the other in grandeur, Allah's book, and my Ahlulbayt. Beware how you deal with them after I am gone. The Most Kind the Omniscient has told me that both of these would not separate until they come to me by my Pond."

Ali, the Ameer al-Momineen

He then came down from the platform and performed the two units of prayers of thanksgiving. Soon the Adhan was called for the noon prayers, and the whole crowd of a hundred thousand

Muslims prayed behind the Holy Prophet. He then ordered Ali's tent to be pitched next to his own, where he called all Muslim men to come in small groups to congratulate Ali addressing him the 'Leader of the Believers', the Ameer al-Momineen. From then on, it became a tradition to address Ali as 'Ameer al-Momineen Ali'. All of the women followed, starting from the wives of the Prophet, congratulating Ali, for being crowned the Master or Mawla of all Muslims.

The Almighty God, satisfied with the grand proclamation of 'that which has been revealed', sent Gabriel down with the revelation culminating His Message to the humanity through the trustworthy personality of the Holy Prophet Muhammad, "This day those who disbelieve have despaired of your religion, so fear them not but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as the religion."¹⁵⁶

The Holy Prophet had declared Ali his successor multiple times before today, the very first declaration being two decades ago when the Prophet had presented the religion of Islam to his cousins and uncles, in the event of the Da'wat Dhu 'l-Ashira. All of those who had ridiculed the young Ali back then were present today in this crowd witnessing with their own eyes the honor that was bestowed upon him by the final Messenger of God.

Then on every occasion afterward, the Holy Prophet had made a point to mention Ali's authority over his nation. When he recounted the events of the Laylat ul-Me'raj, he told his followers about Ali's name written next to his in heavens. When Ali had slept on his bed on the frightful night of migration, the Prophet had left his trusts with Ali to fulfill those in his absence.

During his migration to Medina, the Prophet purposefully waited for Ali in the city of Qoba so that they both enter the city together, showing his new followers who his successor was. Then in Medina, he had decorated Ali in the battles of Badr, Uhud, and Khandaq, telling people how much God and the Prophet adored Ali for his services. And then only a year ago, he had made Ali the caretaker of Medina in his absence during the Tabuk expedition. And when the Christians of Najran came along, he had only brought along Ali in the final debate with the delegation of Najran designating Ali 'same as himself'.

But today was different. The number of Muslims had exceeded more than a few million in the Arabian Peninsula, the fruit of Muhammad's efforts in the past twenty-three years. The one hundred thousand who were present here witnessing the succession of the Final Prophet had numerous more left behind sitting at home anxiously waiting for their arrival.

Omar was the first among men who had congratulated Ali on this occasion. But soon after the Holy Prophet closed his eyes, many of these men ganged up on Ali, forgetting their oath at Ghadeer and displacing the center of Islam from its proper place. This was similar to their battles in the past when a little glitter of the gold or a little fear of harm used to make them run away from the battlefield. In the greater battle of the struggle against the desirous self, they lost at the altar of their egos consciously, making themselves forget the event of Ghadeer. Still, many more throughout the past and the future generations of Muslims remembered the Prophet's declaration in the Ghadeer al-Khum upholding their allegiance to the Qur'an and the Ahlulbayt, promoting the sublime Mission of the Holy Prophet.

THE PROPHET'S DEMISE

The Holy Prophet made his way back to Medina after seeing off all of his followers from the pond of Khum, where he had made a history-changing declaration in front of the whole of his nation called from now on the Ummah. Once back in Medina, the Holy Prophet could not find much rest since at least three men of wealth and influence had revolted against the Prophet in various regions of Arabia. All three had declared themselves as the prophet. They used to show people some simple tricks that they must have learned from the street entertainers in Syria, which they used to re-enact to deceive simple-minded people. One such imposter used to pass an egg through the narrow mouth of a bottle claiming it was his miracle; such was the intellect of his followers that they used to believe him. His own followers murdered one of those imposters due to his strange habits. Another two who had surfaced in the Yamama and the Najd regions, respectively, around the modern-day city of Riyadh, were also discarded a few years later.

The test of Ummah begins

In the month of Safar, 11 AH, the Holy Prophet assembled an expedition towards Syria, wherein the area near Mota, some of the Muslim border guards, were recently killed by the miscreants coming from the Roman governed provinces of Syria. A young man named Osama was made the captain of the expedition. A few years ago, in the first battle of Mota, Osama's father Zaid had fallen fighting valiantly against the Romans, the same expedition in which Jaffer had also expired.

Osama was not new to the combat; only a few years back, he was made the captain of another battalion in which he had to

chase some troublemakers. At that time, he had achieved victory fairly quickly, but he was also reprimanded by the Holy Prophet when he had recounted one of the events of the battle. A combatant Osama was chasing had pronounced his belief in God facing his certain death. Osama thought the man was bluffing, so he killed him anyway. When he returned, the Holy Prophet had criticized him very harshly, asking him repeatedly, “did you peek in his heart?” The Holy Prophet eventually pardoned Osama due to his sincere repentance.

The Holy Prophet had handpicked many of the members of this new army, totaling four thousand in number; they had included many of his early followers from the Muhajirun and Ansaar, especially including Abu Bakr and Omar. He had explicitly ordered Ali to stay with him in Medina. He then ordered Osama to march fast towards Syria and to fall upon his enemies in surprise. The next day though, the Prophet fell ill and could not attend to the state business. The following day he recovered enough to come out and grant the Islamic standard to Osama telling him to move out of the city of Medina, which he immediately did and made a camp in the town of Jorf, a few miles out of the city.¹⁵⁷

Mutiny in the army

Muhammad was clearing Medina of the hypocrites for a smooth transition of the God selected successor of his. But those who were bent on open defiance of the Prophet of God objected Osama’s appointment on the pretext of his young age. Osama was about eighteen at that time. Meanwhile, someone from the Prophet’s household was sending consistent reports to the older members of the expedition, informing them of the fast deteriorating condition of the Holy Prophet. Incidentally, they

were the same ones who were resisting the most to Osama's appointment.

One week had passed by in this condition, but the expedition didn't make any advance. The Prophet by now was extremely weak from his illness, and it was suggested to him to stay in an apartment closest to the pulpit of the mosque. Fatima's apartment was overlooked, and many of his wives pressured him to move to Ayesha's apartment, which he did. He still was continuously visiting the mosque leading the regular congregation prayers. After one such prayer, he seated himself on the pulpit urging the Syrian expedition to march on finally saying in disdain, "Accursed are those who keep back from joining the force."¹⁵⁸

In one of the congregation prayers soon afterward, he noticed the same faces sitting behind him in the mosque, those he had ordered to go with the expedition. Seeing them, the Holy Prophet recited the revelations, "By the Time. Indeed humankind is in the loss. Except those who have believed and done righteous deeds. And advised each other to the truth and advised each other to patience."¹⁵⁹ He then recited the passages from the Qur'an, indicating that God and His Prophet knew what was hidden in their hearts, "And when the matter was determined, if they had been true to Allah, it would have been better for them. So would you perhaps, if you turned away, cause corruption on earth, and break your relationships? Those are the ones that Allah has cursed; He made them deaf and blinded their visions. Then they do not reflect in Qur'an, or maybe there are seals on their hearts?"¹⁶⁰

A couple of days later, the Holy Prophet was in his apartment resting when he heard the Adhan and someone saying Abu Bakr

was getting readied to lead the prayers in the Mosque. The Holy Prophet had ordered Abu Bakr to be in Jorf with Osama's expedition. The Holy Prophet called Ali and Fazl b. Abbas, resting his arms on their shoulders, he proceeded towards his prayer mat. Sure enough, Abu Bakr was there standing in the place of the Prophet about to get readied to lead the congregation. When he saw the Holy Prophet coming, he hurriedly went on the side and sat in one of the rows behind the Prophet. The Prophet remained silent, led the prayer, and retired to his apartment soon after.

The Prophet stopped from writing his Will

On Thursday, a few days before his last day in the world, the Holy Prophet was in his chamber surrounded by Ali, Fatima, Hassan, Husain, some of his wives, and a few followers. Omar and Abu Bakr were standing towards his feet, although they were supposed to be in Jorf. As the Prophet recovered from his unconsciousness, he asked for something to write on, demanding, "Bring me paper and ink so that I may write down for you a document that would save you forever from sliding into the error." Omar loudly exclaimed, "The man is hallucinating; God's book is enough for us."¹⁶¹

Many sided with Omar; some went to bring the pen and paper, a few of his wives started murmuring sending for this one or that one for the pen, others stopping them. Omar again loudly chided one of his wives hearing which the Prophet said, "Don't scold them; they are still much better than you are," now someone leaned forward asking him what was that he wanted to record? But disheartened at Omar's behavior, he just closed his eyes reciting the verses, "O you who have believed, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet or be loud to him in speech like the loudness of some of you to the others,

lest your deeds become worthless while you recognize not.”¹⁶² A few moments later, the Prophet opened his eyes and catching his breath told them, “Be gone, let me be alone, my present condition is better than what you bring me to.” The Prophet’s condition deteriorated very fast from this day onwards. On following Saturday, when Osama came to see the Holy Prophet, he could not talk to him due to his unconsciousness.

Muhammad’s last moments

On the morning of the Monday following the calamity of Thursday, the Holy Prophet supported by Ali and Fazl b. Abbas came out of his chamber to lead the prayers. The Prophet’s Mosque was unusually full today; many of his followers had arrived to find out the condition of their Prophet. He was seated on his prayer mat, and in this position, he led the morning prayers in a very weak voice. Bilal was repeating the motions of the prayers loudly after him so all could follow properly. After the prayers, the Prophet asked Ali to help him to his pulpit. Sitting on the first step of the pulpit, the Holy Prophet delivered the very last sermon of his life. As the Holy Prophet glanced towards his followers, the hypocrites, those who were ordered to march to Syria but were still here in defiance, were hiding in the rows of the congregation.

After proclaiming the praises of the Lord of the worlds, he loudly announced, “O you people, indeed the command of my Lord has been communicated to me respecting a thing that you must follow. I have brought to you the luminous and straightway, and have made the faith so obvious to you that its very night is bright as a day. Do not then act contrary to it after I am gone. I make nothing lawful or unlawful for you, which the Qur’an does not. I leave among you two main things, which while you stick to, you will never go astray; namely the Qur’an

and my Ahlulbayt, both of which are my caliphs, and can't be separated from each other until they rejoin me at the fountain, where I shall ask you how you dealt with them after me. Indeed on that day, huge numbers will be shunned away from the fountain, the same as when you water your camels, you shun away the strange ones. Some of you will approach me saying I was such and such to you, and I'll answer that I know you, but after my departure from this world, you turned back from the faith, therefore be away from the mercy of God and be close to His wrath." The Holy Prophet then got off from the pulpit holding Ali's arm and slowly retired to his apartment.

This turned out to be his last public appearance to his followers. On the same day, he fell very ill; from his bed, he called all of his wives, reminding them of the verses of the Qur'an prohibiting them from venturing outside after his death. Then he called for Fatima who he hugged for a long time, they both silently sobbed together until the voices of their cries were audible to all those around them. He then said something to Fatima on which she lightly smiled, wiping tears from her father's face and then from her own. She then hugged him again, hiding her face in the Prophet's chest for a long time, while the Prophet kept caressing her head kissing her forehead multiple times while supplicating something to God. Fatima was six months pregnant at the time.

He then called Hassan and Husain; they both holding their grandfather from both of his sides kept kissing his face and hands until all those around them started wailing loudly. Someone finally separated the three on which the Holy Prophet asked all those who were around him to be mindful of the status, they and their mother Fatima held in front of God, reminding how he used to stand and walk a few steps whenever

Fatima used to come to see him. Then he called for Ali, giving his verbal will to him telling him to pay his loans and asking him to remain patient on what was going to befall him and his household and to remain on the path of righteousness when he would see others rushing after the success in this world.

Around midday, they heard a knock on his apartment's door. Someone was asking permission to enter while the Prophet was in an unconscious state. Fatima replied that it was not the appropriate time. The visitor kept knocking until the Prophet regained consciousness. Gabriel came to the Prophet, telling him, "This O Prophet is the angel of death. He asks your permission to enter your house. Never before has he asked permission of any man, neither will he ever ask from anyone other than you." The Prophet then asked Fatima to open the door, so the visitor entered and said, "O Prophet of the Lord! Surely God has sent me to you and has ordered me to act according to your wish. Allow me to take your soul, and I will take it, or order me to leave, and I will leave." Gabriel then said, "O Ahmed, your Lord is desirous of you," hearing this, the Holy Prophet said, "Proceed then and do your work." Gabriel then sent his most venerated salutations on the Holy Prophet saying, "Peace and blessing be upon you, O Prophet of the Lord, my messaging to the earth ends with you." Replying Gabriel's salutations, the Holy Prophet calmly rested his head on Ali's chest while his and Ali's faces were covered under his mantle. He then slowly closed his eyes forever. The Holy Prophet was sixty-three years old at the time of his demise.

Washing and Burial of the Holy Prophet

The Prophet's body was resting on his bed, covered with his cloak. Ayesha sent someone to call for Abu Bakr, and Hafsa rushed another one to bring Omar. Omar arrived first, after

seeing the face of the Prophet he ran outside, his sword drawn out yelling that he would smite anyone who would think the Prophet was dead. Soon Abu Bakr came too, and after viewing the body of the Holy Prophet said, "Alas! Sweet were you in your life, and sweet are you in your death." He then went to Omar and told everybody gathered in the Mosque that the Prophet had indeed passed away. Umm Ayman, the mother of Osama, sent somebody for him with the news of the Prophet's passing away. He had just issued the orders of the march, but hearing the news, he returned to Medina while his army dispersed from the camp of Jorf. His standard-bearer also came in, planting the flag in front of the apartment where the Prophet's body was waiting for the burial rites. Someone came running to Abu Bakr and Omar, informing them that many notables of Medina had assembled in Saqifa Bani Sa'da and were about to choose Sa'd b. Obeida as their leader. They rushed out, leaving Ali and others for the shrouding of the Holy Prophet.¹⁶³

Meanwhile, Ali struck with grief and pain, was preparing to wash the Prophet's body along with Abbas and his sons. The door was closed, and a curtain was placed between the door and the room where the Holy Prophet's body was resting. Today alone, Ali was giving the last ritual bath to the Holy Prophet reciprocating a decades-old favor while washing the three days old Ali, the Holy Prophet had foretold that one day, this baby will be giving him his last bath. Abbas was assisting from the outside of the curtain as nobody else other than Ali was allowed by the Holy Prophet to perform his last bathing. After the ritual bath, Ali put back on the garment that the Holy Prophet was wearing. Over it, they wrapped two white sheets of simple fabric. A striped Yemeni cloak was then placed over his blessed body, after which his devotees were invited to come in to pray

over him. People came in the groups of tens to bid their farewell to the Prophet of God.

Very early morning on Wednesday, the Holy Prophet burial was performed. There used to be two gravediggers in Medina, Abu Obeida b. Jarrah and Abu Talha Zaid b. Sahl. Prophet's uncle Abbas sent someone to bring one of the two. Both should have been present here already since the matter was about their dear Prophet, but Abu Obeida was not available; he was busy in Saqifa playing politics on the matter of the leadership of the Muslims. Abu Talha came and dug the grave; Ali and Abbas helped him. Ali remained in the grave of the Prophet, cleaning the grave with his bare hands, followed by lying there on the ground for a while. He was the last to come out of the grave. Between the cries of Fatima and her children and of Umm Salama and a few other wives, the blessed body of the Prophet of Islam was lowered in his grave. Only Ali, Abbas, their sons, a few other Hashemites, and a handful of Prophet's followers were present at the Prophet's burial. After the grave was filled with earth, the participants sprinkled some water on it. Then they prayed over it and left Ali alone on the grave. Ali, as the designated successor of the Holy Prophet, remained there reciting some supplications which only an heir of the deceased ought to recite. In the afternoon, the women of Medina and some followers of the Holy Prophet came to Fatima's house for condolences.

EPILOGUE

Soon after the demise of the Holy Prophet, the community he had so painstakingly cobbled together started to come apart. Those who had gathered in the Saqifa Bani Sa'da had declared Abu Bakr as their new leader. When Ansaar demanded to pick one of their own, they were silenced with the argument that Qureish were more deserving of the Prophet's succession due to their closeness with him in a relationship. When they were reminded of Ali's selection by the Holy Prophet, the argument was made that he was too young to assume the responsibilities of the leadership.¹⁶⁴ When Ali resisted, his house was attacked, and he was dragged to the mosque to force him into submission.¹⁶⁵ When Fatima supported her husband, she was crushed between the burning door of her house and the wall behind it. Their unborn son became the first casualty of the demand for 'Justice for Ali'.¹⁶⁶ Within four months, Fatima too left the world with broken ribs and bruised face. According to her own will, she was buried at night, depriving Abu Bakr and Omar of attending her last rites. Muhammad's followers, to this day, don't know where her real grave is.¹⁶⁷

Omar, who had assumed the charge of soliciting the allegiances from Medinites, started threatening the Muhajirun and Ansaar with exiles and confiscation of properties. Khalid, who was charged with collecting allegiances from the suburban tribes, resorted to violence against women and murders to break the opposition into submission.¹⁶⁸ Ali who was by far the most engaged activist in the life of the Holy Prophet was ignored to the level where he used to dig wells around Medina to keep himself busy.¹⁶⁹ The land of Fadak, which the Holy Prophet had gifted to Fatima in his life, was seized by the government of Abu

Bakr to deprive her husband and children of their source of income.¹⁷⁰ Within the six months of the demise of the Holy Prophet, his revolution was completely derailed from its original Mission.

After being touted as the unity candidate in the brawl of Saqifa, Abu Bakr died in the third year of his rule in Medina.¹⁷¹ He had handpicked Omar in his will. Omar's reign lasted for ten years, during which the Arabian conquests expanded the caliphate from Arabian Peninsula to Persia to North Africa. A Persian convert later murdered him.¹⁷² Then Othman was selected from among the six candidates chosen by Omar. His rule lasted for twelve years, mostly mired with accusations of nepotism and financial corruption. He was murdered in Medina by a mob of disenfranchised Muslims.¹⁷³ Then the deprived masses elected Ali as their new leader. He reluctantly accepted the leadership on the condition that he would be delivering the 'unconditional justice' regardless of anybody's chagrins. His rule lasted for six years in which he had to fight three consecutive rebellions against the privileged classes, one led by Ayesha, the estranged wife of the Holy Prophet, one by Muawiyah b. Abu Sufyan for his demotion from the governance of Syria, and one by the group of Kharijites who blamed Ali for all ills in the Islamic lands. He became the victim of his administering the unconditional justice to the corrupted classes and was murdered by an assassin while in the state of prostration in his morning prayers.¹⁷⁴ Then the wobbly caliphate of inconsistent selections and sad endings went into the hands of Umayyads who, under the shrewd leadership of Muawiyah, founded the first Arab empire spanning from India to North Africa.

From then until today, the hijacked nation of the Holy Prophet has been under the thumb of this king or that dictator bereft of

EPILOGUE

playing any noteworthy role in the development of collective human progress. The Mission of the Holy Prophet would remain an elusive ideal until his nation corrects the folly of the party of Saqifa Bani Sa'da and returns the succession of the Holy Prophet to its intended heir. Then the 'world shall be filled with peace and justice as it has been filled with injustice and tyranny'¹⁷⁵ as was prophesized by the Al-Ameen and As-Sadiq Prophet of God, our beloved Muhammad ibn Abd Allah – May the Peace and Blessings of God be on Him and his Holy Progeny.

The End

AFTERTHOUGHTS

The writing of this book has reaffirmed my belief that nothing that God does is random and happens in a vacuum. Even though everything seems so coincidental and at times, so casual to us, He has a plan for each and everything. So although on the onset it may appear arbitrary, in actuality, the Prophet of Islam was specifically sent in a time and age when the circumstances and people were in a phase, which was a complete subset of the world we live in today. Had it not be the case, his Message, the Qur'an didn't feel like it was revealed for today's day and age.

In my opinion, without analysis, history is just another storytelling. I hope as you were reading this book, you were connecting the dots between the events that happened in the past to the events that are happening all around us today. Now you can substitute the names of the bad guys of the time of the Holy Prophet and match their characters to those who are around us in the world stage today. The horrors we have seen in the civil war in Syria¹⁷⁶ and the Saudi aggression in Yemen¹⁷⁷, all resonate so much with the characters of Banu Umayya and Banu Makhzum of the past.

Things that we sense, hear, and watch, seem so familiar today as it was in the time of the Holy Prophet. From the issues on which we unite and the nonissues that are highlighted to divide us, the monopolies of modern clans and subgroups in our modern tribes, the apparent and hidden tyranny that some of us recognize and others just brush aside, the deception of the perpetrators of these tyrannies and the cluelessness of their victims, the role of mass brainwashing in exploiting our patriotism to fulfill the monetary or colonial goals of some, and

the vested interests active in the background to stop us from recognizing the truth. Scratch the surface lightly and the connections between the sponsors, the facilitators, the instigators, the perpetrators, and the foot soldiers, all seem to be the same today as it was in the time of the Prophet of Islam.

From a purely historical perspective, I also hope that this book has helped you gain an appreciation of the Prophet of Islam for who he truly is. The most compassionate man as God has called him in addition to the man of the best morals and the finest etiquettes in Arabia. In a society where it was honorable to kill daughters, he used to stand up in love and respect for his daughter when she used to visit him. When people were bought and sold only for a rich man's son to get a feel of killing another human, he used to toil for a random slave of a tyrant so the poor man could get some extra hours of sleep. When powerful men used to kill the whole families only to get preferential rights to get water from a common well, he used to sell his possessions to pay off the debts of a random person.

But besides all these, he was a person who had transformed the human values from their core in a short span of twenty-three years of his revolution. Not only that, he taught us how to be better humans, but he also gave us systems and methods through which we could do so together as a society. He elevated us from our baser selves to teach us to get to our true potentials to join us with God. As was suggested at the beginning of this book, I truly hope you felt this history as opposed to memorizing it. If at any time during the reading of this book, you felt the greatness of the Holy Prophet of Islam, my purpose of writing it is fulfilled.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank God for granting me the love of His Messenger, the honorable Prophet Muhammad, may His peace and blessings shower upon him and his holy Ahlulbayt. This book is a humble effort to show my gratitude for the gift of this Love, something that was granted without me doing anything to earn it.

This book would not have been a possibility without the help of a few friends who offered their help on mostly a text message from me for enlisting them in this project.

I won't name you, but a couple of you nudged me to write this book; I can't thank you enough for opening this world of writing to me. The main idea was to write a book for the young adults to introduce them with the real Prophet of Islam, who has become obscured by the actions of the people who carry the same name as his but exhibit the character of his opponents. I hope this book would serve the purpose. I hope better books will be available in the future.

Special thanks to Dr. Khusro Arastu for letting me use his valuable research in the chronology of Islamic events even before his work was published. I'm looking forward to his great piece of research to be out in the hands of his readers. I surely would be referring to it with my backstage privileges meanwhile.

Many thanks to another few friends and their kids who spent their valuable time proofreading this book for its content. With all my mistakes and typos, they remained patient with the

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versions number 1, 2, 3 ... 10, 15 and still kept proofreading it for me, along with giving me their valuable advice and guidance.

Also, a lot more thanks to my family for allowing me to hide in my corner after work, for the empty chair at the dinner table, and for letting me miss all the fun activities that you 'force' me to participate. Special thanks to my two pre-teens who proofread this book and told me frankly of the sections that didn't make sense, and to my five years old Moosa, who gave me my pen name. Also, for my wife to keep filling the gap that I left in the home for the last few months, for keeping my coffee mug full, and for tolerating my 3 am 'aha!' moments.

Lastly, I dedicate this book to those non-Muslim friends of mine who sincerely try to find the truth about my beautiful faith. Thank you for being so understanding, I hope this book showed you why few billion of us adore The Holy Prophet so dearly.

Glossary of Characters

Abbas b. al-Muttalib	Uncle of the Prophet of Islam
Abd Allah b. Abd al-Muttalib	Father of the Prophet of Islam
Abd al-Muttalib	Son of Hashim and grandfather of the Prophet of Islam
Abraha bin al-Sabah	Ethiopian viceroy of Yemen the leader of elephant army
Abu Bakr	Accepted Islam in Mecca
Abu Jahl	Amr b. Hisham, the main adversary of Muhammad in Mecca
Abu Lahab	Prophet's main adversary and husband of Abu Sufyan's sister
Abu Sufyan b. Harb	Shakr b. Harb, leader of Banu Umayya and main adversary Muhammad
Abu Talib b. Abd al-Muttalib	Guardian of the Prophet of Islam and the Father of Ali
Ahlulbayt	Household of Muhammad which he founded to preserve his Mission
Al-Muttalib	Brother of Hashim b. Abd-Manaf
Ali b. Abu Talib	Cousin, son-in-law, and the designated successor of Muhammad
Amena bint Wahb	Mother of the Prophet of Islam
Ansaar	Muslim citizens of Medina who hosted the Prophet of Islam
Ayesha b. Abu Bakr	Wife of the Prophet of Islam and the leader of first civil war in Islam
Banu Hashim	The clan of Hashim b. Abd-Manaf
Banu Makhzum	The clan of Qureish famous for Abu Jahl, Waleed, Omar, and Khalid
Banu Umayya	The clan of Shams b. Abd-Manaf
Fatima b. Asad	Mother of Ali
Fatima b. Muhammad	Daughter of the Prophet of Islam
Fihrr b. Malik	Other name Qureish, the patriarch of the tribe of Qureish
Hamza b. Abd Al-Muttalib	Uncle of Prophet who fell in the Battle of Uhud
Hassan b. Ali	First born of Ali and Fatima
Hashim b. Abd-Manaf	Great grandfather of the Prophet of Islam
Hind. Bint Utbah	Wife of Abu Sufyan and the mutilator of Hamza b. Abd Al-Muttalib body
Husain b. Ali	2 nd son of Ali and Fatima
Jaffer b. Abu Talib	Brother of Ali and leader of Muslims in Abyssinia
Khadija bint Khuwaylid	Wife of the Prophet of Islam in Mecca and the mother of Fatima
Muhajirun	Muslims who migrated from Mecca to Medina
Muhammad b. Abd Allah	The Prophet of Islam
Negus	Najashi the Christian king of Ethiopia or Abyssinia
Omar	Accepted Islam in Mecca and 2 nd ruler of Arabia after Muhammad
Sheiba al-Hamd	Real name of Abd al-Muttalib
Waleed b. Al-Mughira	Chief of Banu Makhzum tribe and main adversary of Muhammad
Umayya b. Khalf	Adversary of Muhammad in Mecca
Umm Salama	Wife of the Prophet of Islam in Medina
Zaid b. Haritha	Surrogate son on the Prophet of Islam
Zubair b. Abd al-Muttalib	Uncle of the Prophet of Islam

Glossary of Events

570 CE / 571 CE	1 st Year of the Elephant	Birth of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam
585 CE / 586 CE	16 th Year of Elephant	Fijar or the ‘sacrilegious war’ of Hijaz
595 CE / 596 CE	26 th Year of Elephant	Marriage of Muhammad and Khadija
595 CE / 596 CE	26 th Year of Elephant	Founding the League of the Righteous, Hilf al-Fuzool
600 CE / 601 CE	31 st Year of Elephant	Birth of Ali ibn Abi Talib
610 CE / 611 CE	1 st Year of the Be’that	First divine revelations to Muhammad
613 CE / 614 CE	4 th Year of Be’that	Presenting Islam to the Family, Da’wat Dhu ‘l-Ashira
615 CE / 616 CE	6 th Year of Be’that	Migration to Abyssinia
616 CE / 617 CE	7 th Year of Be’that	Sanctions on the clan of Banu Hashim
619 CE / 620 CE	The Year of Grief	Abu Talib and Khadija pass away
619 CE / 620 CE	The Year of Grief	Sanctions on Banu Hashim end
620 CE		1 st pledge at al-Aqaba in Mecca
621 CE		2 nd pledge at al-Aqaba in Mecca
622 CE / 623 CE	1 AH	Muhammad’s migration to Medina
622 CE / 623 CE	1 AH	Writing the Constitution of Medina
623 CE / 624 CE	2 AH	Battle of Badr, Order of mandatory fasting
623 CE / 624 CE	2 AH	Closing of the doors into the Prophet’s Mosque
623 CE / 624 CE	2 AH	Marriage of Ali and Fatima
624 CE / 625 CE	3 AH	Birth of Hassan b. Ali, Battle of Uhud
625 CE / 626 CE	4 AH	Birth of Husain b. Ali, Death of Fatima b. Asad
626 CE / 627 CE	5 AH	Battle of Khandaq
627 CE / 628 CE	6 AH	Peace Treaty of Hodaybia
628 CE / 629 CE	7 AH	The Conquest of Khyber
629 CE / 630 CE	8 AH	Conquest of Mecca, Battle of Hunayn, Hadith al-Kisa
630 CE / 631 CE	9 AH The Year of Delegations	Treaty with Christians of Najran & Egypt, Tabuk war
631 CE / 632 CE	10 AH The Year of Farewell	The Prophet’s Hajj, Event of the Ghadeer al-Khum
632 CE / 633 CE	11 AH	The Prophet’s demise

Glossary of Places

Abyssinia	Kingdom of Abyssinia, modern-day Ethiopia
Al-Marwah	Elevated landmark of Hajj
Asia Minor	Turkey and adjacent regions
As-Safa	Elevated landmark of Hajj
Badr	The place of first war in defense of Medina
Busra al-Sham	A region of Southern Syria
Byzantine Empire	Eastern Roman Empire
Gaza, Palestine	Burial city of Hashim, the great-grandfather of the Prophet of Islam
Haramayn Sharifain	Two Holy Sanctuaries, the Mosque of Ka'ba and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina
Hijaz	Fertile coastal region of Arabian Peninsula next to the Red Sea
Hira	The cavern in which Muhammad received the first divine revelation
Jabal al-Nour	'Mountain of Light' in Mecca hosting the cavern of Hira
Khyber	The stronghold of Jewish tribes near Medina
Levant	Modern day Syria, Jordan, and Palestine
Persian Empire	Modern day Iran and Central Asia
Mecca	City hosting the edifice of Ka'ba
Medina	City hosting the grave of the Prophet of Islam
Mount Thowr	Muhammad took refuge here during his migration to Medina
Qoba	Town in the suburb of Medina and the host of the first mosque of Islam
She'b Abi Talib	Secure house of Abu Talib where Banu Hashim took refuge during sanctions
Tabuk	An area near the border of Hijaz and Jordan and the site of the Battle of Mota
Ta'if	An agriculture city near Mecca
Uhud	The mountain near Medina where the 2 nd war of defense of Medina was fought
Yathrib	Old name of Medina
Yemen	A region of Arabian Peninsula
ZamZam	The fountain or well in Mecca

Glossary of Terms

Aam	Year
Al-Ameen	The Most Trustworthy
Al-Lat	Pre-Islamic idol deity
Al-Uzza	Pre-Islamic idol deity
Allah o Akbar	God is Greater (greater than anything one could assume as the greatest)
Ameer al-Momineen	The Leader of the Believers, a title bestowed on Ali by the Prophet of Islam
Arab al-Ariba	The original Arabs
Arabia Deserta	Desert region of Arabian Peninsula
Arabia Felix	Fertile Arab, regions of ancient Yemen
Arab Mostariba	Arabs who learned Arabic
Arabia Petraea	Roman province of pre-Islamic Arabian Peninsula
As-hab al-Feel	The People of the Elephant
As-hab al-Kisa	The people of the cloak, namely Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hassan, Husain
As-Sadiq	The Most Truthful
Asad Allah	The Lion of God, a title bestowed on Ali ibn Abi Talib for his bravery
Feel	Elephant
Fijar	Sacrilegious war
Ghusl	Ritual ablution
Hajj al-Akbar	Major Pilgrimage of Ka’ba which has to be performed in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah
Hajj al-Asghar	Minor Pilgrimage of Ka’ba which can be performed in any time of the year
Harem	Holy Sanctuary like the sanctuary of Mecca and Medina
Haramayn Sharifain	Two Holy Sanctuaries, the Mosque of Ka’ba and the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina
Hajr al-Aswad	The heavenly stone affixed in Ka’ba
Hilf al-Fuzool	The League of Righteous
Hijra	Migration to Medina
Hobal	Pre-Islamic idol deity
Jihad	Struggle, in specific terms the defensive war
Jihad al-Asghar	The ‘minor struggle’, also used for the defensive war
Jihad al-Akbar	The ‘major struggle’ or fighting the desirous self
Khalifa	The vicegerent of God appointed by God, not humans
Khilafa	The office and the domain of the Khalifa
Ifk	False accusation
Ihram	The simple garb donned during the pilgrimage of Mecca
Isra	The horizontal journey of Muhammad from Mecca to Jerusalem
Ka’ba	Cubical edifice in Mecca
Kisa	The cloak
Laylat ul-Isra wa al-Me’raj	Muhammad’s Night of Ascension to heavenly journey
Me’raj	The vertical journey of Muhammad from Jerusalem to the celestial realms
Mehr	The marriage gift to bride
Muslim	The one who submits to the Message of God
Omra	Minor Pilgrimage of Ka’ba
Nikah	The Islamic marriage contract between a man and a woman
Qadha	Obligatory substitute of a religious duty missed due to inability to perform in time
Qasr	Shorten version of an obligatory Islamic duty due to travel or distance
Rawi	One who recites the poetic work
Shoara	Poets (singular Shaer)
Tawaf	Seven circuits of ritual circumambulation around Ka’ba
Ummah	The nation of Islam
Wali	The leader, the guardian, and the friend, the Successor of the Prophet
Wahi	The divine revelation of God
Wilaya	The office and the domain of the Wali

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The 'Primary Sources' are listed in the order of their influence in putting this book together. The two commentaries of the Qur'an listed at number 1 and 2 helped make the core of this book. The two books mentioned at number 4 and 5 in the list helped set the pattern of this book.

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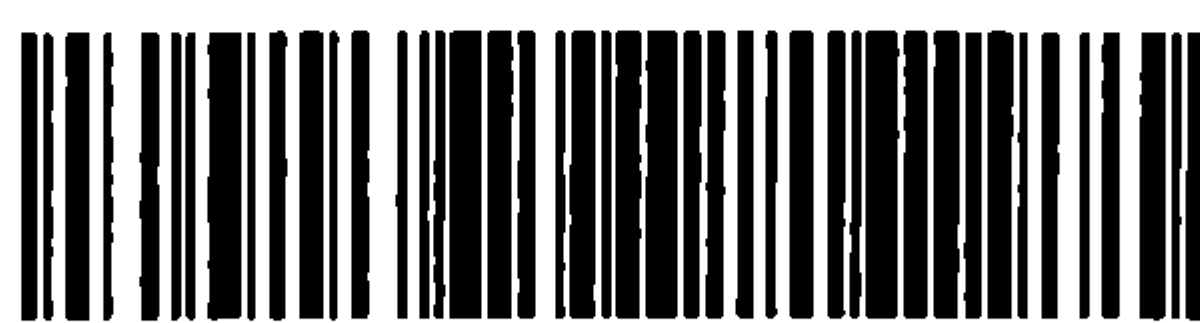
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Muslims believe in the same God as the Christians, and the Jews do. The only difference is Muslims also believe that Prophet Muhammad is the Last Prophet of God. They also believe that he is the perfect person ever born. Since Muslims believe this, they naturally try to follow his example.

On October 27, 2018, when a mass murderer shot over a dozen people in a Jewish Synagogue in the USA, two Muslim charities raised about a quarter of a million dollars to contribute towards the funeral costs of the Jewish victims. The motivation was, the Prophet of Islam had ordered Muslims in God's Holy Book to protect the Christians and the Jews in their places of worship. Obeying this order, this was the least the Muslims could do.

Surprised! I would be too, given all the negative news that we hear from the parts of the world where the population is majority Muslim. Now to know the full truth about Muslims, you will need to read this book.

It will introduce you to the real Muhammad - the most compassionate man ever lived. It will also introduce you to his enemies - the most vicious people Muhammad had to live with. These were the similar people you hear about in the news, those who carry the same name as his but have the character of his enemies. This book will help you appreciate Muhammad and his Message for what they are and discern from what they have been made to look like.



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